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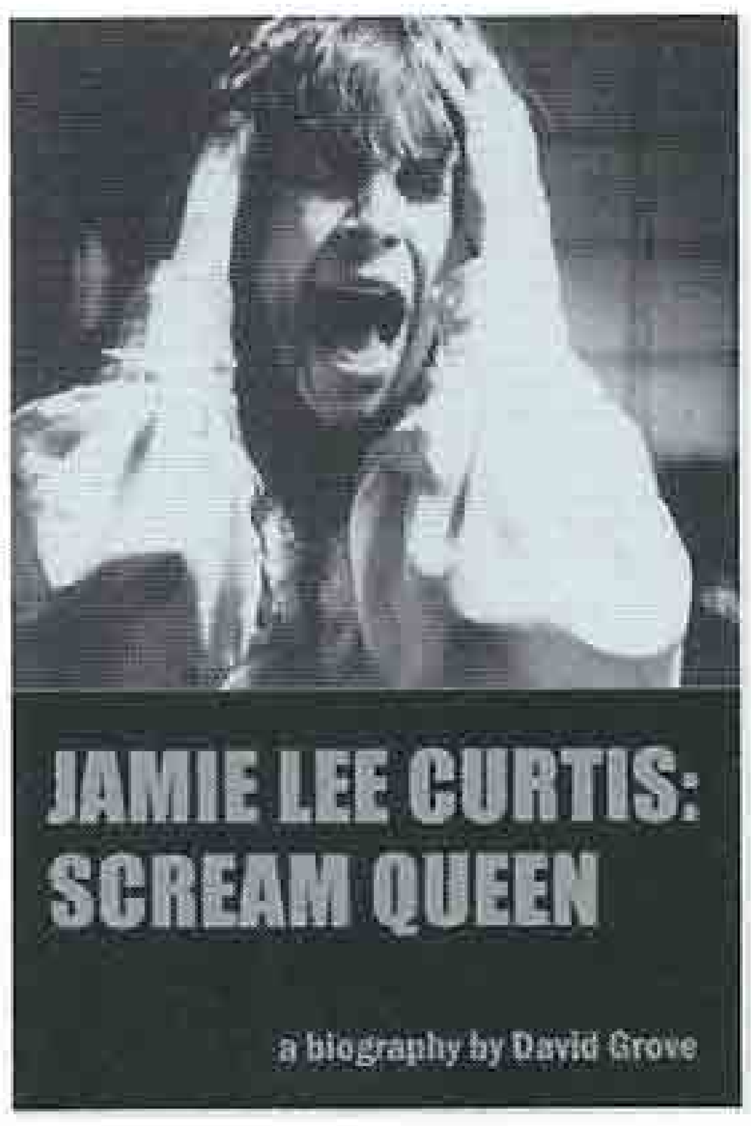
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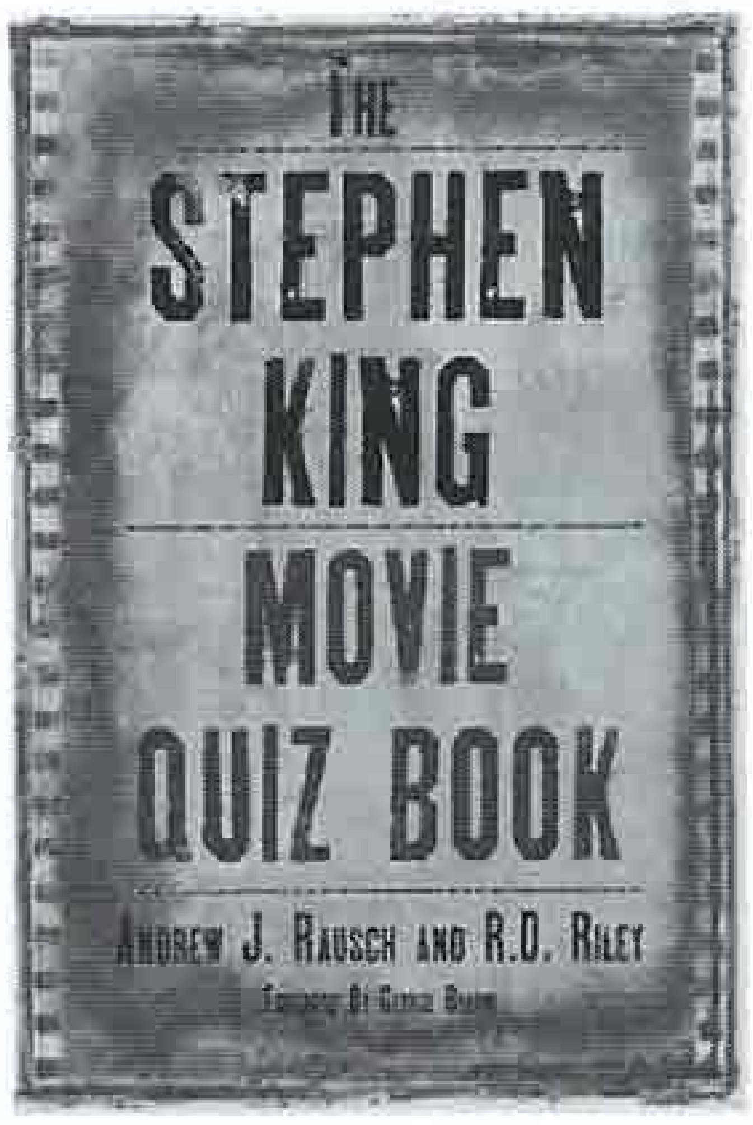
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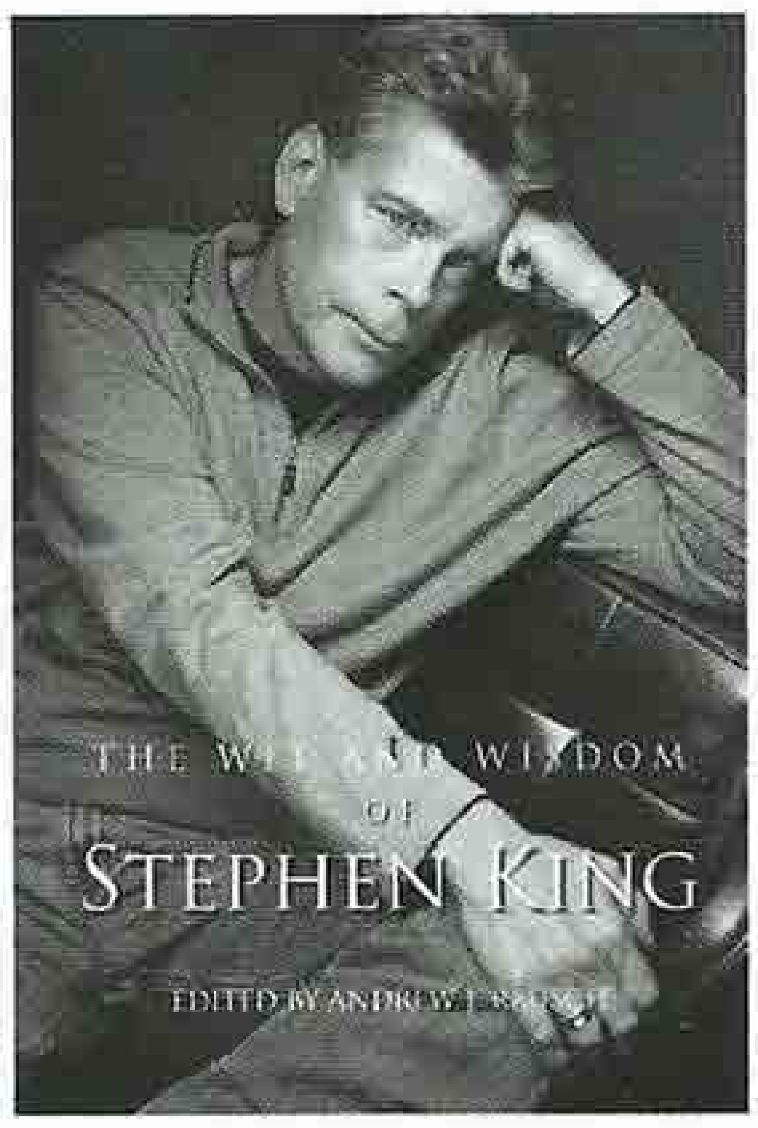
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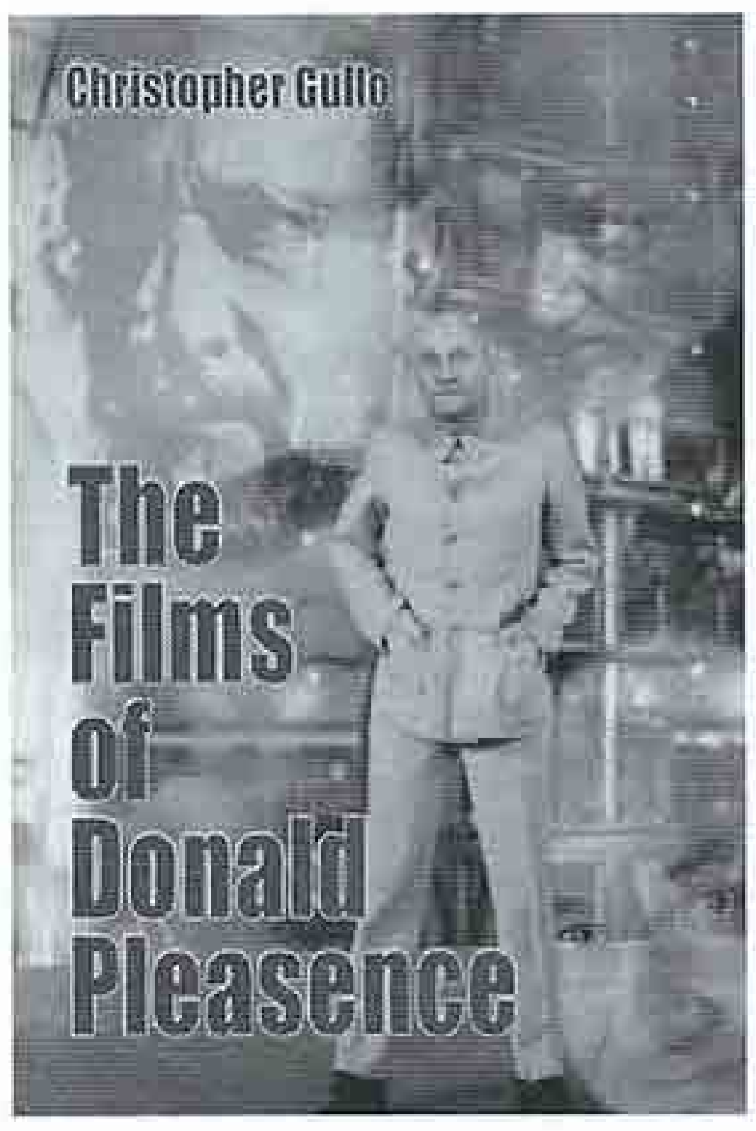
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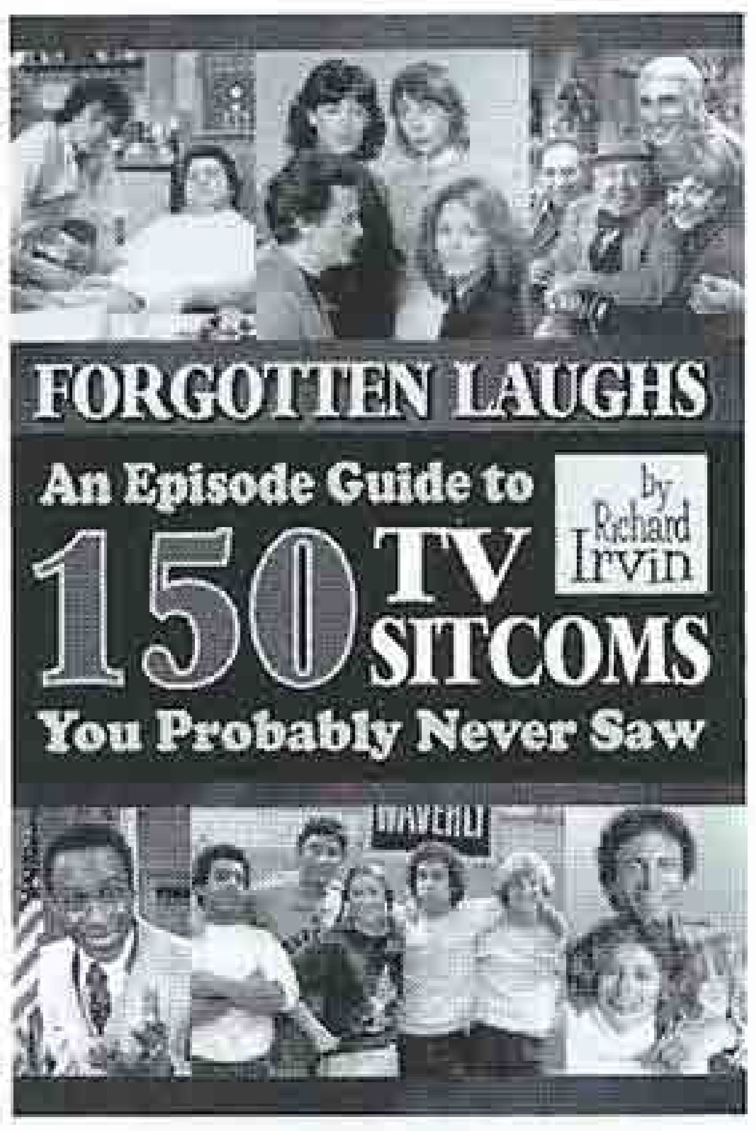
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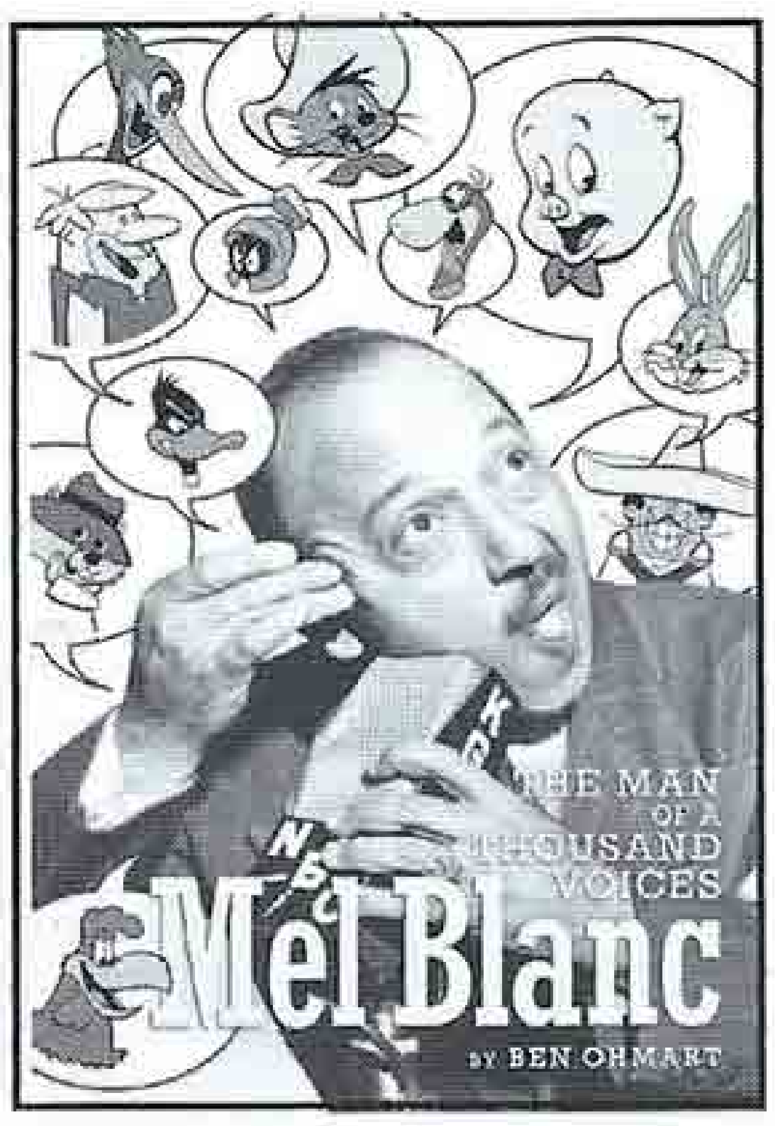
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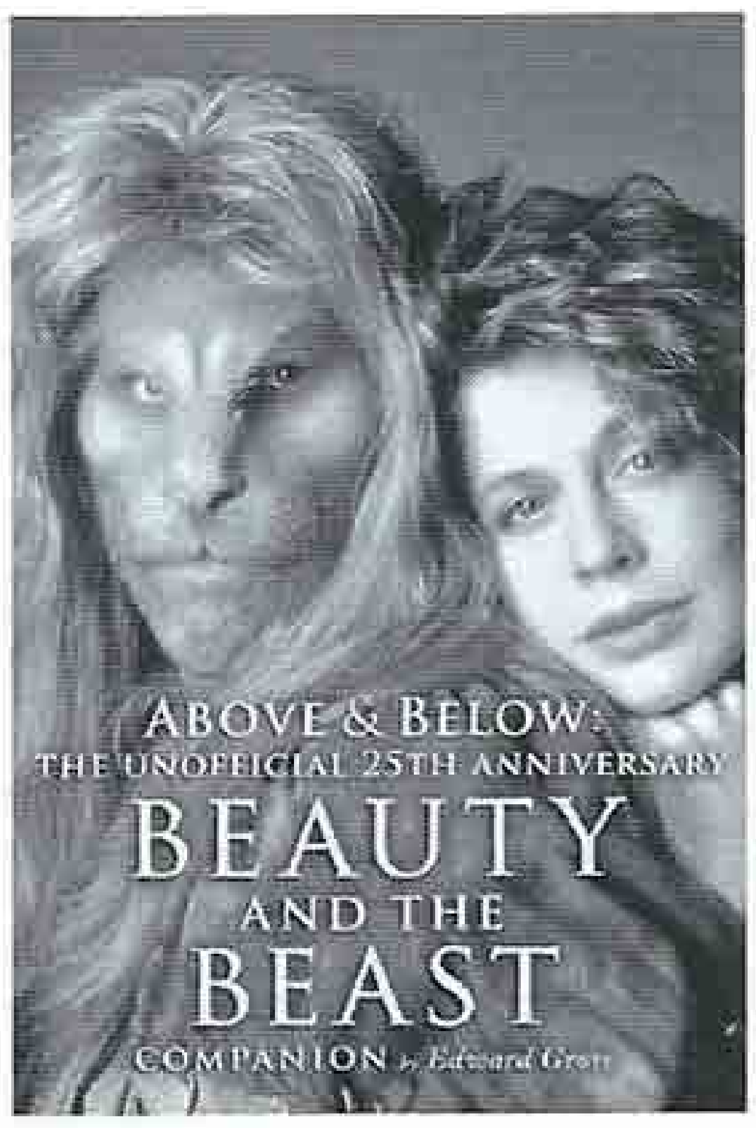
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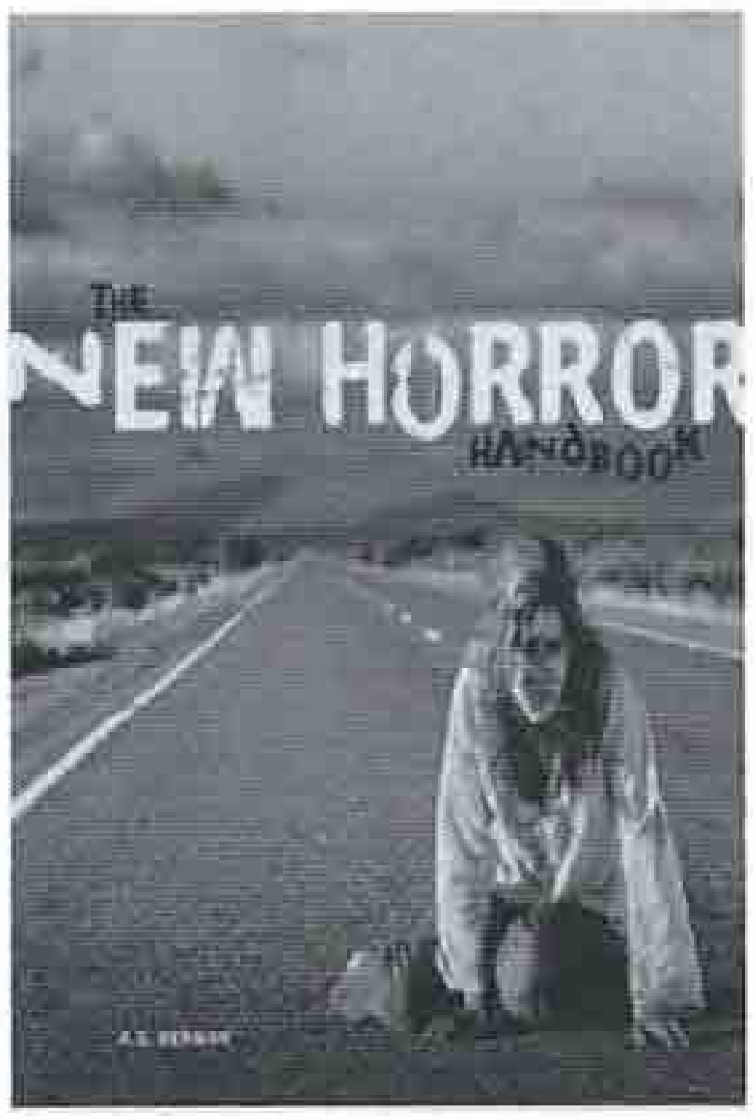
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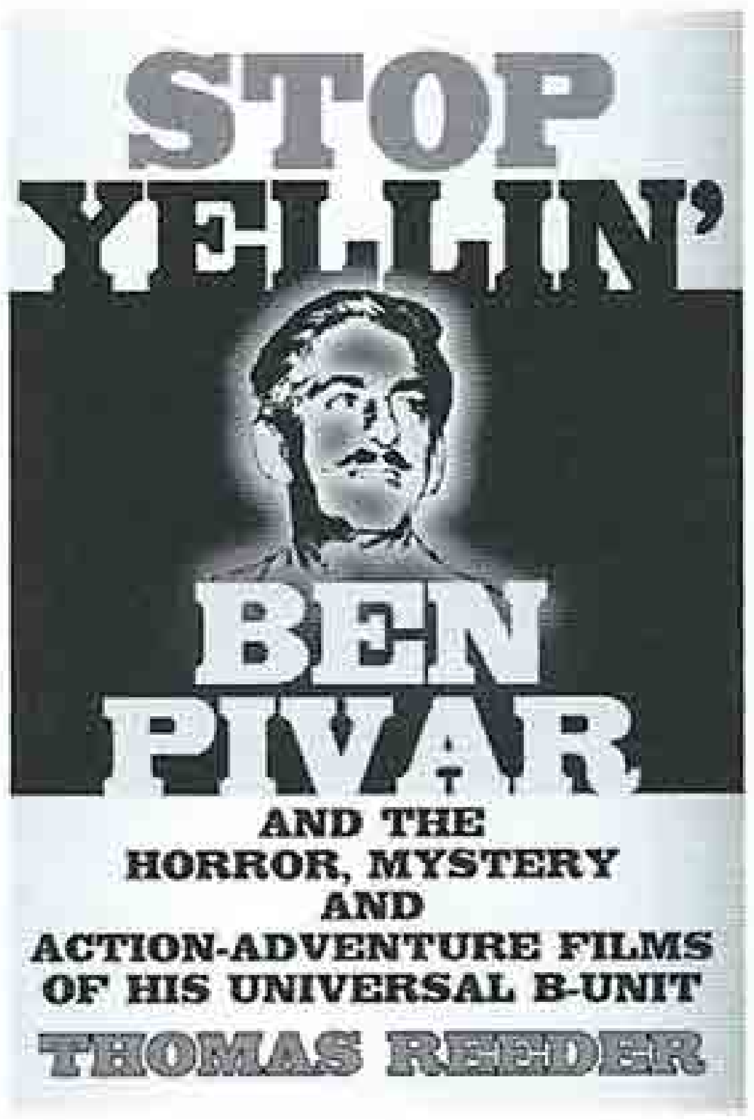
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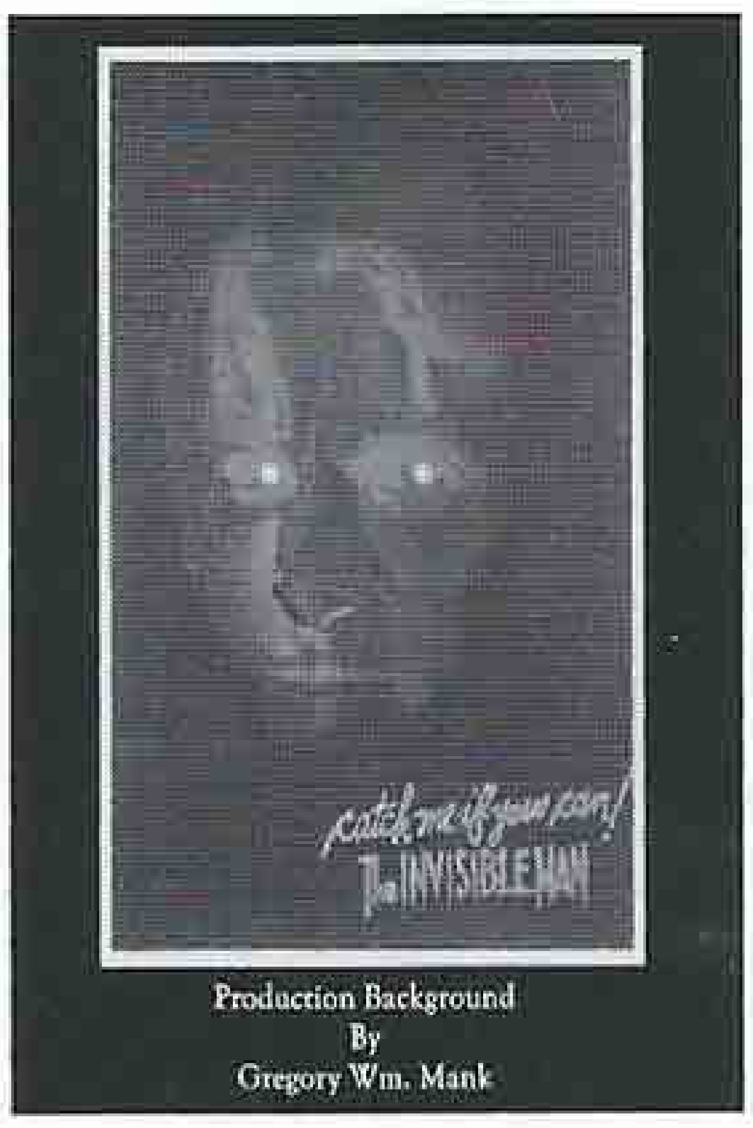
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JOHN CARPENTER

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From the Editor

The first time I "met" John Carpenter, I do believe it was in the form of a husky making its way with purpose across a stark, cold, snowy landscape. A benign image, and yet even before the scenario darkened, with bearded men taking shots at the poor canine from their chopper perch, I felt something was…wrong. Of course, during that single prime-time TV—and edited-to-hell—showing of *The Thing*, I was too young and didn't have the tools to articulate why the sequence was so unnerving, but now I know, of course: It was the music. Ennio Morricone's score, abetted by John Carpenter—a single synth bass note tapped twice, with an echo clipping quietly behind it and a descending keyboard note washing over the whole thing. Simplicity, yet placed so perfectly over the image that the impact is massive, and a textbook example of how to properly distill horror from the everyday.

That's what John Carpenter—at his best—does. He's of that generation we horror fans hold so close to our hearts, that post-'60s American period when the typical masked menace and gritty reality crashed head-on against absurdist metaphysics with art and poetry. John Carpenter *is* a poet—though he would probably laugh at that assertion—a master stylist who never gets fussy to the point that his work is sterile. Rather, the joy of a Carpenter film is that he takes detours, focuses on the task at hand but allows himself to be distracted and wander and, most importantly, lets his own musical stylings and tastes steer the boat while he, the director, goes out for a smoke.

So vital is Carpenter's musical vision to his work that you can easily lump him in with European and Italian masters like Mario Bava and Dario Argento, auteurs who also pushed rhythm, tone and tune into the forefront as main characters (Carpenter himself has admitted an affinity for Argento as one of the keys to crafting the music and mood of *Halloween*). When we watch a Carpenter movie, we see it *and* feel it. His work has an energy and aura that could only come from an artist who loves and instinctually comprehends music.

And of course, Carpenter not only pushed the horror and fantasy genres in varying directions with his handful of bona fide classics, but he was instrumental in steering FANGORIA in a certain direction as well. I'd say that Fango came of age with Carpenter, in fact, as our inception came only a year after the breakout smash success of *Halloween* and walked simpatico with him through triumphs and missteps alike for the next three decades. He's cinema royalty. He's a master of genre-blending, and like his peer George A. Romero, he's a cinematic outlaw who has managed to make movies his way in and out of the Hollywood machine, while always being an above-the-credits guy. And like Romero, he's a FANGORIA Legend, and this is our tribute to him. Enjoy.

—Chris Alexander
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Dedicated to Debra Hill (1950-2005)

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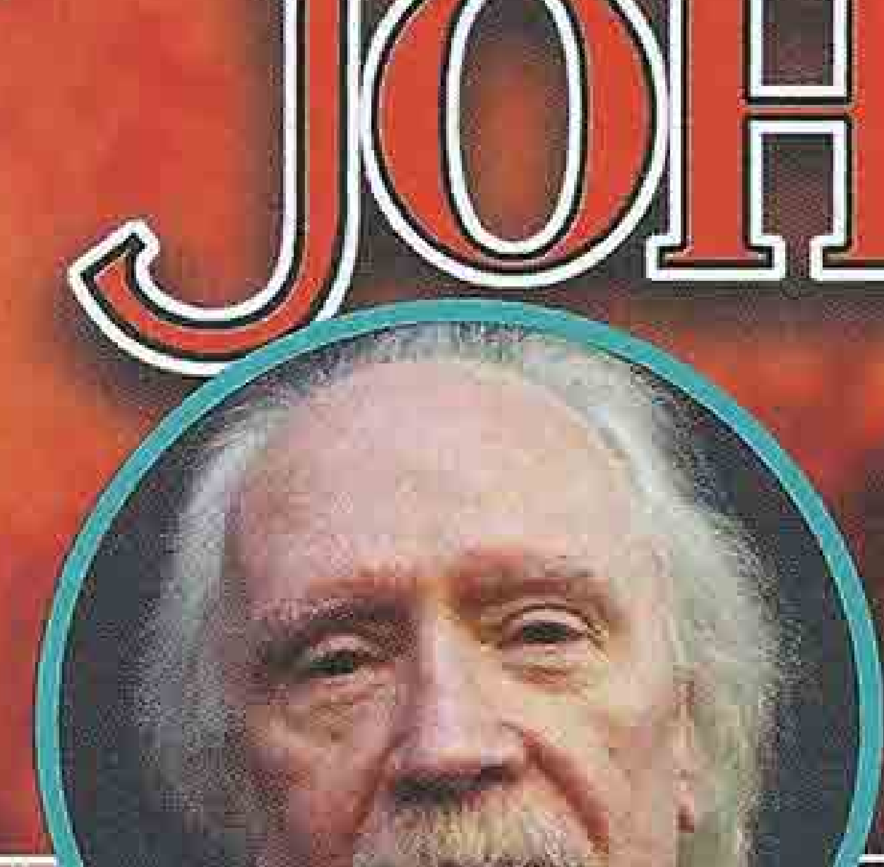
JOHN CARPENTER

THE INTERVIEW



The man who's scared us with psychopaths, possession and more opens up his mind and soul for a career chat.

By JUSTIN BEAHM

Photo: Copyright Columbia

Dressed for the sun, John Carpenter puts creature of the night Thomas Ian Griffith through his *Vampires* paces.

We open this magazine with an intimate conversation with the Prince of Darkness, playing a game of word association relating to his life and career. The day of our get-together finds Carpenter the recent sufferer of a detached retina, and between surgeries to restore his vision. Despite his discomfort, the resulting one-on-one tells the tale of the outcast Southern boy turned cinema icon, with brief, insightful, often funny commentary from the mouth of madness himself. All titles. All genres. Nothing held back. This is John Carpenter on John Carpenter.

FANGORIA: Let's start in Bowling Green, Kentucky…
JOHN CARPENTER: Bowling Green was where I grew up, from the time I was 5 years old to 18. I was pretty much an outcast, especially with the girls. They didn't want anything to do with me; I was too weird. I grew up watching movies at the Capital and State theaters downtown, which is where I fell in love with them.
FANG: When was the filmmaking seed planted?
CARPENTER: I remember that the day I wanted to become a director was when I was 8 years old. I went to see *Forbidden Planet*, and it was just astonishing. I thought it was something I wanted to do. Around this time, I started noticing the name of Roger Corman, who seemed to be involved in all the films I liked the most. His movies were engrossing, with an incredibly fast tempo. This one man fascinated me, and that's when I formulated my early impressions of what a director does.
FANG: EC Comics…
CARPENTER: Loved them. I came into contact with them very early. They were forbidden, thought to cause juvenile delinquency, so there was something special about getting your hands on them. I especially liked the science fiction. They were great, grim stories.
FANG: Your first movie camera…
CARPENTER: It was a German model that my father used called a Eumig. Piece-of-shit 8mm camera, and instead of an automatic shutter, it had a regular shutter, so you had to take light readings to get your exposures. It had a single-frame

Auto chop class was in session for *Christine*'s Keith Gordon.

Photo: Copyright Columbia

function, so I did some stop-motion animation, badly. I got my friends to act in little scenes from movies that were playing back then.

FANG: *Revenge of the Colossal Beasts …*

CARPENTER: A title that I made up out of the movies I had been seeing. It wasn't a film I finished, and nobody will ever see it. Ever [*laughs*].

FANG: The rest of your early shorts: *Terror from Space, Warrior and the Demon, Sorcerer from Outer Space, Gorgo Versus Godzilla, Gorgon the Space Monster* and *Captain Voyeur…*

CARPENTER: I came up with titles reminiscent of the movies I loved when I was a kid in the '50s. Usually science fiction, creatures, monsters, outer space. There wasn't much to them, and most of them were just one scene.

FANG: *The Resurrection of Broncho Billy* (1970)…

CARPENTER: That was a student film at USC, and I was part of a five-man crew. I was the editor and did the music. It was a chaotic shoot; the director and producer hated each other, and there would be these protracted arguments about the movie's ambiance. It was ridiculous, but we won an Academy Award. One of the guys from the production—not me—got to go to the ceremony, and the next day, Bernard Kantor, the head of the cinema department at that time, brought the Oscar to show the rest of us in a paper bag. That was my closest brush with Oscar: in a paper bag.

FANG: *Last Foxtrot in Burbank* (1973)…

CARPENTER: Charles Band hired me as an editor on this thing, a sexual spoof of the Marlon Brando movie *Last Tango in Paris*. There was all this awful X-rated footage. I put together parts of it, then they went back to reshoot stuff and recut it all.

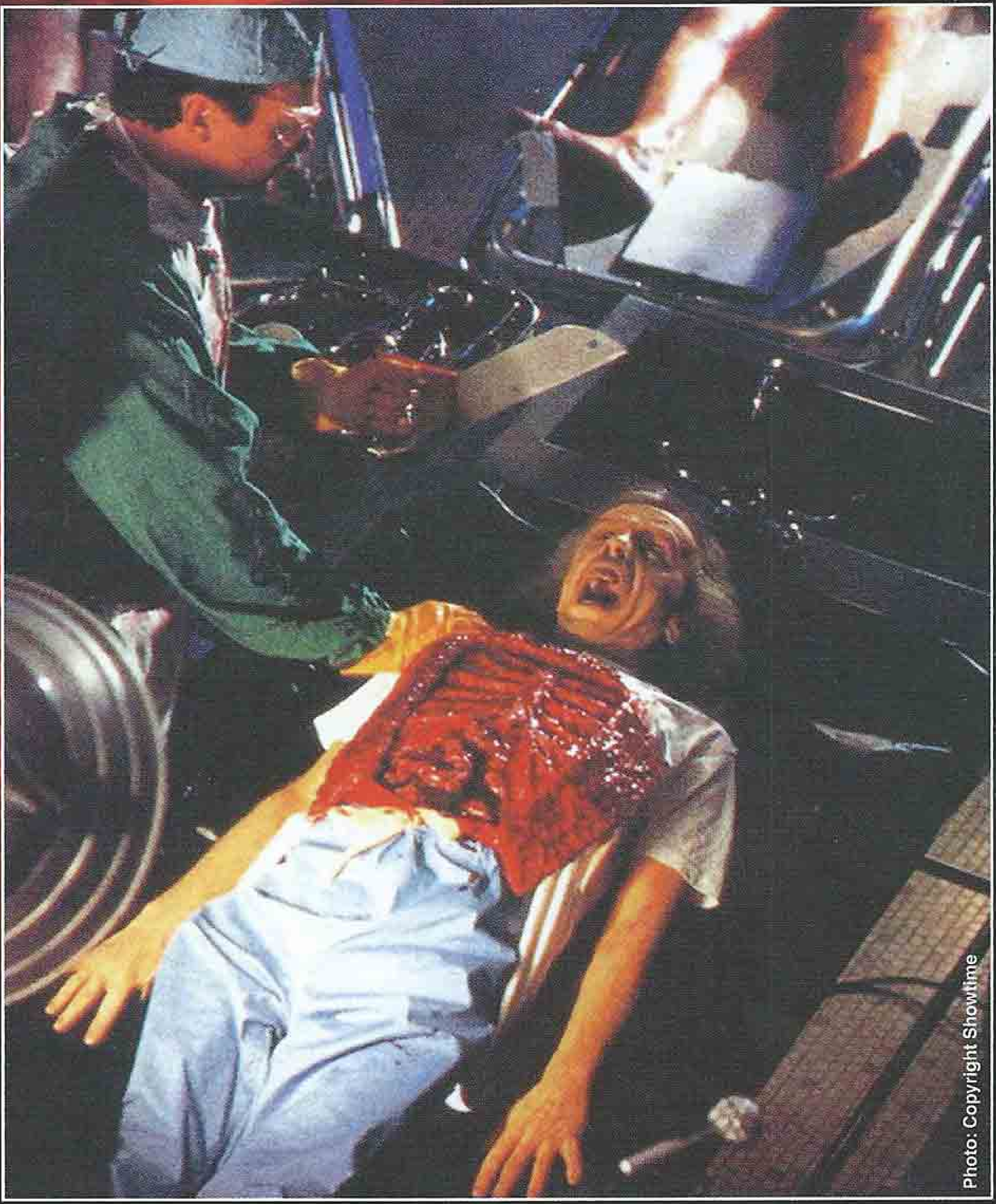


Photo: Copyright Showtime

Just call him John Coroner when you're talking his *Body Bags* gig.

In the late '70s and early '80s, Adrienne Barbeau and Carpenter were partners in life and onscreen crime.

FANG: Charles Band…

CARPENTER: He is a strange character. His dad was Albert Band, the director and producer. He would break into Italian once in a while because he grew up over there. He was always making movies, skating on the edge of the business. He had a [theatrical] distribution company at one time, Empire Pictures. He is one of those guys who never experiences failure, because he just moves on to the next thing. They say when the atomic bomb goes off, all that will be left will be cockroaches, and I think the only other survivor will be Charlie Band.

FANG: *Dark Star* (1974)…

CARPENTER: This was a project I started at USC that became a feature because of the friendship and participation of Dan O'Bannon. Dan was a classmate of mine, and was back for a semester in 1970, but he ran out of money and was going to have to go home. We were about to work on *Dark Star*, so I gave him a place to live, and then four years later, it was released in theaters. We were student filmmakers, and thought we were hot shit. It was an endless odyssey trying to get this motherf**ker finished.

"[*They Live* was] my primal scream against the Reagan revolution, which is still going on."

When it was finally done, I had the bright idea that, because I was such a genius, as soon as anyone saw this film, a limo was going to pick me up and take me off to a soundstage to start directing. That didn't happen. No one gave a shit. That was the first bad review I got, in *Daily*

Photo: Copyright Paramount

It's appropriate that a man who has often felt trapped by the studio system wanted to *Escape from L.A.* (with Kurt Russell).

Variety. Ayyyyye. They didn't see any of my genius, apparently [*laughs*].

FANG: Dan O'Bannon…

CARPENTER: Early, very close friend. Dan was a complicated man, and enormously talented. He was acerbically funny, and there was an edge to him. He liked to humiliate people, which was unfortunate. He had a lot of ghosts, like we all do—a lot of demons in the closet.

FANG: Did you stay close with O'Bannon until his passing?

CARPENTER: We broke off our friendship in 1975 because Dan wanted to be a director, and the last thing I needed was to work with an actor/editor/writer who also wanted to be a director. He badmouthed me over the years, but every once in a while he would call me up to renew our friendship. He contacted me just before *Alien* was released, at which point he was addicted to opium, and was going on about how he loved to go to Europe and Amsterdam to buy girls over there. Other than the addiction, he seemed to be doing all right. Then he turned against me again. He came back later when we were to collaborate on a special edition of *Dark Star*, which was the last time I heard from him.

FANG: *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976)…

CARPENTER: That was the first movie I made in 35mm, in Panavision, and the first film I made straight through, meaning it was my first feature schedule. A friend and an acquaintance of his put up the money, and I wrote and directed it. That was the longest I had ever shot; it was rough. I was the editor [using the pseudonym "John T. Chance"], and strung it together, then a couple of friends added some footage. I remember after *Assault* was shown at a film festival, one reviewer commented, "This movie is an example of how not to make a thriller, and the man responsible is John Carpenter."

FANG: Panavision…

CARPENTER: My love! My cinematic love! Nothing looks better than 35mm or 70mm film running through a camera with Panavision anamorphic lenses. Nothing. Magic.

FANG: Debra Hill…

CARPENTER: My script supervisor on *Assault on Precinct 13*, who became my girlfriend, and who I made a producer on *Halloween*. She had a talent for producing. She understood making movies and getting talent together.

FANG: *Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978)…

CARPENTER: An early screenplay purchased by Jon Peters at Columbia Pictures. I wrote two early drafts, and then they moved on to David Zelag Goodman, who rewrote me. Irvin Kershner directed the film, and I haven't seen it in so long, I don't even remember what it is like. I do remember they f**ked up the vision thing. If you're seeing through someone else's eyes and you don't see through your own eyes, you'd fall down immediately. You'd have vertigo and lose your balance. It would be a weird physical sensation, and they didn't have any of that going on. They also should have shot it with a Panaglide; it shouldn't have been handheld, but hell, I didn't make it.

Photo: Copyright New Line

How big a star is *In the Mouth of Madness'* Sam Neill?

FANG: *Someone's Watching Me!* (1978)…

CARPENTER: My first studio shoot for Warner Bros., on a soundstage with a crew, and I was green. It was amazing. I met my first wife, Adrienne Barbeau, on it, and Lauren Hutton gave the performance of her career in that movie. We shot it in no time at all, 18 days or something, and for hardly any money. It was based on a true-life story, something that happened in Chicago. I learned a lot on that set. Two weeks later, I was shooting *Halloween*.

FANG: Barbeau…

CARPENTER: I had forgotten the cardinal rule: Never marry an actress. We fell in love, but weren't right for each other. However, we survived for a while and had a great kid. She is remarried, has twins and is very happy. I am happy for her.

FANG: *Zuma Beach* (1978)…

CARPENTER: I wrote that for a producer who just said he wanted a beach movie. He ended up selling it to Warner Bros., and soon Suzanne Somers was starring in it. I was going to direct it—for about 10 seconds—but one of my mentors, Richard Kobritz, who later produced *Christine*, helped me see I didn't want to do it. It was vastly rewritten, so I really shouldn't have taken credit for it, but I was a little asshole in those days.

FANG: *Halloween* (1978)…

CARPENTER: Born out of a meeting that Debra and I had in England with Moustapha Akkad, who was going to put some seed money into low-budget features. He had hooked up with Irwin Yablans, who had come up with this idea for *The Babysitter Murders*. He wanted something that every teenager in America could relate to. I said yes, as long as I got final cut and could put my name above the title. Moustapha had gone to UCLA and had directed a couple of movies, so he was a smart man. We had a meeting and moved forward. Shot the movie in something like 20 days.

It became the movie I am most known for, but at first, boy, did it get bad reviews. I have always gotten bad reviews, especially early on. On *Halloween*, people were saying things like, "Carpenter is not gifted with actors," and so forth. I was starting to question if I was in the right business, but the film did OK.

FANG: Dean Cundey…

CARPENTER: Debra introduced me to Dean, who is a tremendously talented cinematographer. Kind of a strange guy to deal with, and can be sarcastic on the set, but wow, what a cameraman. He and I discovered the Panavision anamorphic fast lenses together on *Escape from New York*.

It was a moment of pure joy when we found we could open the lenses to 2.2 or 1.8, and shoot a scene in the middle of Ventura Boulevard at midnight. You couldn't do that before—you had to pour light all over the place. It changed how we made movies.

FANG: Moustapha Akkad…

CARPENTER: He took *Halloween* and rode that baby for years. He had an annuity coming from that thing. By the time I last talked to him, around 2004, he had forgotten Donald Pleasence's name, referring to him as "that British gentleman," and explained how to get through night shoots. He said that the secret to longevity on set was to take a nap every day.

FANG: Jamie Lee Curtis…

CARPENTER: When Jamie Lee read for us on *Halloween*, she was a contract player over at Universal, and they let her do the movie. She was terrific, really innocent in those days, and gung-ho. She knew everything; the world and the business caught up with Jamie a couple of years later. I came back and directed a couple of scenes intended to expand *Halloween* for television, and by then she had changed a bit. Wonderful lady.

Photo: Copyright Universal

The longtime wrestling fan refereed Roddy Piper's ultimate screen smackdown with Keith David in *They Live.*

> **"After [*Ghosts of Mars*], I was burned out on directing… I couldn't do it anymore. I had fallen out of love."**

FANG: *Elvis* (1979)…

CARPENTER: My earliest memory of *Elvis* was the gigantic screenplay. Everybody in town had turned this thing down because they thought it was going to be a piece of shit. I loved Elvis, and was a big fan. We got this guy I didn't know named Kurt Russell to play Elvis. That was a baptism by fire. We had 180 pages of script, 88 speaking parts and 150 different locations, all in 30 days. I never want to work that hard again. I would fall asleep in dailies every day, so I don't even remember seeing many of them.

FANG: Did you shoot at Graceland?

CARPENTER: No, but we went through it. Wow, what a dump. This was where the King lived? We found a location in Long Beach that worked for Graceland.

FANG: Kurt Russell…

CARPENTER: I didn't know much about him, but once we started working together, I was blown away by his enormous amount of talent. Not only that, but his old-fashioned actor discipline. He memorized lines, knew to hit his marks and understood the mechanics of making films. After that, I knew he could play anything. We're still close friends. Great guy.

The late Debra Hill (left) first teamed with the director to reinvent screen fear on *Halloween.*

FANG: *The Fog* (1980)…

CARPENTER: I signed a two-picture deal with Avco Embassy, and this was the first, a little ghost story. We shot it at Point Reyes in Inverness, California, which was such a paradise that I bought a house up there. I remember mixing it the first time and thinking it was a piece of shit, so we went back and reshot a bunch of things. Every movie you do, you try to get a bit of extra time at the end to do inserts and additions. You want that in your back pocket, because you never know what you might need. For this one, we had extensive rewrites and reshoots.

FANG: Tom Atkins…

CARPENTER: Tom was a friend of Adrienne's, and a really good actor. Around the same time as *The Fog*, he was in a movie called *The Ninth Configuration*, directed by William Peter Blatty, that he was excellent in.

FANG: William Peter Blatty…

CARPENTER: Oh Lord. Back in the '80s at some point, some company offered me *Exorcist III*, based on Blatty's book *Legion*, which was his sequel to *The Exorcist*. I got the screenplay and was shocked that it had no exorcism in it. I started meeting with Blatty, and it became clear that what he really wanted to do was direct. He was trying to push me away, which he eventually did. I couldn't deal with it anymore. He directed it, showed it at a preview and the audience asked where the exorcism was, so they went and shot one, and tacked it on. It felt that way, too. It had to be about that. The whole story needed to lead up to it.

FANG: *Escape from New York* (1981)…

CARPENTER: A script I wrote back in the '70s, inspired partially by *Death Wish*, with that view of New York as a hellhole. I had been to New York a few times, and it was on the skids back then. Very rough. It was also partially based on a Harry Harrison novel [*Deathworld*], where they send this character to the most dangerous planet in the universe. I thought it was a great idea, so I came up with sending our guy into the most dangerous place in the United States. We got Kurt as the eyepatched Snake Plissken, and it really worked.

FANG: *Halloween II* (1981)…

CARPENTER: "We are doing this movie whether you are with us or not, and you can't stop us," is what I was told. "You can either get on board and help us, or get out of the way." I came on board as producer and wrote the script [with Hill]. All I remember about the writing was desperation, because there really was no story. It just picked up right where *Halloween* ends. I remember drinking beer and writing it. Rick Rosenthal directed it. Once again, at the end, I had to go back and tinker with it, add a couple of scenes and beef it up a bit.

FANG: *The Thing* (1982)…

CARPENTER: An assignment. Stuart Cohen was a friend at USC, and he came to me saying they were trying to remake *The Thing* and didn't know what to do. I suggested going back to the novella by John W. Campbell, and off we went. It was for Universal, and bigger than anything I'd done at that point. It wasn't something I necessarily wanted to do, because I'm so in love with the original movie, but I figured out a way to do something different with it. Kurt shimmied his way into the film, and I got the same bum crew…

I'm kidding, everyone was great. Rob Bottin created those amazing effects, and we made one of the most ferocious monster movies ever. It was hated, and didn't do very well. The fans despised it, and I was a pariah for a while. It got me dropped from my contract, but here we are 30 years later, and it has undergone a reevaluation by people. I maintain that, if *The Thing* had done better, my career would have been completely different, but I can't worry about that now.

FANG: *E.T.*, the *other* alien movie out in summer 1982…

CARPENTER: The kind of movie everybody wanted to see: a happy, uplifting cry about a hydraulic alien that eats junk food. It is a positive alien movie, which to me, having grown up in the '50s, was foreign. If aliens aren't here to kill us, what good are they?

FANG: Howard Hawks…

Photo: Copyright Screen Gems

Carpenter went cold on directing after guiding Ice Cube through *Ghosts of Mars.*

CARPENTER: My favorite director. His are some of the most amazing movies ever made. He is kind of unsung. Visually, he wasn't a pioneer, but he was a pioneer in storytelling. I love him as a director.

FANG: *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982)…

CARPENTER: "Let's do something different," Joe Dante said. "Nigel Kneale is in town, and I'll bet he has a good story!" So Joe and I met with Nigel, and he did have a good story. Nigel was a British author who did a lot of fine stuff—*Quatermass* and television plays. We hired him, then Joe said he didn't want to do it for some reason, so my friend Tommy Lee Wallace stepped in as director. It came out and the audience asked, "Where's Michael?" and it didn't do well, although I think it is better than it is given credit for.

FANG: Tommy Lee Wallace…

CARPENTER: Friend since grade school. I still talk to him and see him occasionally. Really talented musician and artist, and one of my best friends.

FANG: *Christine* (1983)…

Photo: Copyright Fox

When Russell and Carpenter got into *Big Trouble in Little China,* no audience would ever convict them.

CARPENTER: The first movie I got after *The Thing.* I wasn't sure about a haunted-car movie. I didn't know if I could make that interesting and scary, but it gave me the chance to work with John Stockwell, Alexandra Paul and Keith Gordon, all of whom are filmmakers now. We did OK with that movie.

FANG: Stephen King…

CARPENTER: Complicated person and interesting writer. He changed horror by bringing psychic powers into things with *Carrie*. His novels always had a little psychic power in them. He got me into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and I saw The Doors inducted, which was pretty cool.

FANG: *The Philadelphia Experiment* (1984)…

CARPENTER: Great shaggy-dog story. Absolute bullshit, but what a great story. While I was writing it, I couldn't figure out the third act. A friend suggested the revenge of the crew against the people who put them there, but I thought that was too much like *The Fog*. Absolute bullshit.

FANG: *Starman* (1984)…

CARPENTER: This was my first chance to do something different—a love story, a "girl movie." I met my wife Sandy King on that film—she was a script supervisor—and got to work with Jeff Bridges. We shot that all across the country, and it was a great experience. I had wanted to do a movie like that to prove that John Carpenter wasn't all darkness.

FANG: Sandy King…

CARPENTER: The love of my life. Producer, wife, everything associated with being in love with somebody.

FANG: *Black Moon Rising* (1986)…

CARPENTER: That script was written back around the time of *Escape from New York*. It was my "My car is stolen and I'm going to get it back" story. I have never seen the final film.

FANG: *Big Trouble in Little China* (1986)…

CARPENTER: Larry Gordon at Fox assigned that to me. I have been a big kung fu fan for years, and it had a little of everything. It's all the best of Chinese cinema, with people flying around, and has a great, ridiculous hero who doesn't know he's a sidekick. He thinks he's the hero, but he's not. My other producer and assistant director was Larry Franco, Kurt's brother-in-law, and every time I would get a project, Larry would send it to Kurt so he could crowbar his way in. The studio wanted him, and Kurt was great. He had cool '80s hair, and he really delivered.

FANG: The Coupe De Villes…

CARPENTER: College friends who used to play acoustic guitars and sing Bee Gees songs together. We started writing our own songs eventually, and they appeared in a few movies. Everyone in the band became movie directors. We got together a few years ago, but my voice is blown from years of smoking, drinking and directing movies, so I don't have much of anything anymore. But the spirit of the De Villes lives.

FANG: *Prince of Darkness* (1987)…

Photo: Diyah Pera/Copyright Showtime

Creature creator Howard Berger, fellow *Masters of Horror* helmer Ernest Dickerson and Carpenter have a *Pro-Life* meeting.

Photo: Copyright Avco Embassy

When New York goes to hell, you want a tough guy like Lee Van Cleef on your team.

CARPENTER: My experience with the studio on *Big Trouble* convinced me I needed to get back into independent filmmaking. We made a deal for a couple of pictures, and *Prince of Darkness* was the first one. Metaphysical horror. Loved doing the score. I am very proud of that movie.

FANG: Donald Pleasence…

CARPENTER: Friend for years who scared me when I first met him on *Halloween*. I was a punk back then, and knew nothing about working with actors. We were at lunch and he said, "I don't know why I am making this film, but my daughter is in a band in England and says the music in your last movie was pretty good, so I came to do it." It turns out I understand Donald now, after doing several movies with him. He is just like everybody, and wants to be loved and wanted.

On *Escape from New York*, I offered him the part of the President, and he asked why I wanted him. He wants you to tell him how valuable he is to a film. In that case, I had to write him a letter, begging him to be in it. He later had a whole second career as the avenging psychiatrist [in the *Halloween* sequels]. We were pals and hung out a bunch. I loved him. I miss him.

FANG: Religion…

CARPENTER: Being brought up in the Bible Belt South in the '50s, when I went to kindergarten, they read from the Bible to us, every day. It was stunning, because I listened and tried to follow the story, but it made no sense. It got me thinking, and then as I matured and studied the Bible, I came to the conclusion that religions are important to the world—and destructive, but they give laws to us and meaning to people's lives. Since I don't believe in the supernatural, I am only an outsider. It fascinates me, because it is a human need. It fills people's lives, and is an origin story. It's rich.

FANG: George A. Romero…

CARPENTER: I was so impressed with *Night of the Living Dead*, and we became friends. I made the mistake of saying, "Hollywood's not bad, get an agent and come on out," and apparently he didn't have a good time here.

FANG: Dario Argento…

CARPENTER: I've known him for years and consider him a friend. A wonderful man. I went to a festival in Torino in '98 or '99, where they were showing my films, and Dario was there. He and I went to the Egyptian museum together, looking at the mummies. He is a rock star in Italy, with kids running up saying, "Dario! Dario!"

FANG: *They Live* (1988)…

CARPENTER: My primal scream against the Reagan revolution, which is still going on. Nothing will stop it. I had a couple of ways I could make the movie: from the point of view of the middle class or from the point of view of the working poor. I chose to go with the poor.

I have been a wrestling fan since I was a kid, and caught up with it again during the early '80s, the Vince McMahon and Hulk Hogan era. I went to Wrestlemania III, where I met Roddy Piper. I thought he could play the role. I needed someone who was weathered, and not a movie star, and Roddy had plenty of scars. I knew he could do it.

" 'We are doing [*Halloween II*] whether you are with us or not, and you can't stop us,' is what I was told."

FANG: Roddy Piper…

CARPENTER: Still a friend. Rod is one of the toughest men I have ever known. I would never f**k with him. He is double-tough, and would know how to kill you. He has a big heart, and is wounded like everybody. We all are, a little bit, by life. He has had more injuries than anyone I know, and is just shattered. He has great

Photos: Copyright Avco Embassy

Barbeau, Carpenter, Jamie Lee Curtis and Janet Leigh share a clear moment of happiness on the *Fog* set.

The up-and-comer guided veterans Hal Holbrook and Leigh through *The Fog*.

stories, and was the first to really explain the ins and outs of the wrestling business to me.

FANG: You have a G.I. Joe figure from him…

CARPENTER: [*Laughs*] Yeah, Roddy gave me that, and even signed it.

FANG: *El Diablo* (1990)…

CARPENTER: I wrote that Western, and came close to directing it. We were going to shoot in Mexico. Here are my three rules for living: 1) Never leave home unless absolutely necessary; 2) Never eat fish; and 3) Never go south of the border. I can't explain why I didn't do it, because it was a cool story with an edge, but wanting to make a Western was an early dream of mine, and I didn't want to f**k it up.

FANG: *Blood River* (1991)…

CARPENTER: Another Western I wrote, this time for John Wayne's company. Michael Wayne and Tom Kane were story editors, and this was toward the end of John Wayne's life. Of course, he didn't live to make it, but it was fun to write for him. Eventually made into a movie, with Wilford Brimley in the Wayne role.

FANG: *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (1992)…

CARPENTER: After I stopped making low-budget films, I f**ked around for a couple of years, and this came along from a studio. I thought it was a novel idea; there were some fun things in there and I was a fan of Chevy Chase. It was a tough shoot for a lot of reasons, many of which I don't want to go into. I really wanted to quit the business at the end of that movie. I was real unhappy, though I got to work with William A. Fraker, one of our great cinematographers, and I met Sam Neill on that shoot, so there were some positives. It didn't do great business, probably because it wasn't funny enough. People were expecting a comedy, but Chevy Chase wanted to be a serious movie star and leading man. He didn't want to do comedy anymore, and he insisted he was ready for straight roles. That was the problem with the film, in a nutshell.

FANG: *Body Bags* (1993)…

CARPENTER: Was going to be a television series, which it could have been if it had been shot in Canada for little money. I did a couple of episodes, and even acted as the host, in full makeup. That makeup helps you; you aren't afraid of anything. You just start going. We combined all [the episodes] into one film, and put it out there. It was fun.

FANG: *The Silence of the Hams* (1994)…

CARPENTER: Oh God [*laughs*]! Aaaah. I had cast Roger Corman in *Body Bags*, and he was determined to return the favor, so he called me up saying there were some Italian filmmakers doing this movie through his company. He said they wanted me and Joe Dante to play parts in it, and for some reason I cannot explain, I decided to do it, so Joe and I had this scene. It was awful, but I think I impressed Julie Corman. She thought I was a good actor.

FANG: *In the Mouth of Madness* (1994)…

CARPENTER: The script came out of New Line from Michael DeLuca, who was the protégé of Bob Shaye, and it was an adventure getting that thing set up. We shot it in Toronto with Sam Neill, once again. It was a chance to do a little Lovecraft, and was a neat story.

FANG: Sam Neill…

CARPENTER: I love Sam. He is my kind of actor. He knows his scenes, how to play them and how to be a movie star, and does a hell of a job. What more do you want?

FANG: *Village of the Damned* (1995)…

CARPENTER: Completing a contractual obligation. I wasn't particularly interested in doing that movie, but I had to, so we went back up to Inverness and worked with Christopher Reeve. This was right before he had his big accident, and he gave a great performance. It isn't one of my favorite films of mine. The opening is neat, and the barn blowing up is cool, I suppose.

> **"I had the bright idea that as soon as anyone saw [*Dark Star*], a limo was going to pick me up and take me off to a soundstage."**

FANG: Rip Haight…

CARPENTER: Rip Haight lives! That is my Screen Actors Guild *nom de plume*. Rick doesn't get a lot of work. The name was a spur-of-the-moment when I was playing a helicopter pilot in *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*, and they had to Taft-Hartley me into the Actors Guild. I had done a lot of parts in independent films, but I had to join SAG for this, and I just came up with it. I thought it was a great name because it was like Haight-Ashbury. I thought he was cool.

FANG: Is Rip cool?

CARPENTER: Not particularly, anymore. And he doesn't get any work.

FANG: *Escape from L.A.* (1996)…

CARPENTER: Kurt wanted to replay Snake because he loved that character.

With that hood and goggles, how do you really know that's Carpenter directing *The Thing*?

Photo: Copyright Universal

He had been learning how to fly, and came to visit me. We were shooting *Village of the Damned* in Northern California, and he flew up and said he wanted to do this. *Escape from L.A.* was very similar to *Escape from New York* in terms of its structure, but they are quite different other than that. I loved the surfing scene, and working with Peter Fonda and Steve Buscemi. It was a lot of work, but I enjoyed it. Since we made that film, I have realized what the story should have been.

FANG: *Vampires* (1998)…

CARPENTER: That was an offer from Largo, and I got to work with the legendary James Woods, which was an experience. He gave a fantastic misogynistic performance. We sort of reinvented the vampire myth, and tried to bring it out of the castles.

FANG: *Ghosts of Mars* (2001)…

CARPENTER: An idea from the Weinsteins, who asked for a treatment, then didn't like it, so it ended up at Screen Gems. It was a big, epic war film. One thing I will say about it is that it got a positive review from Roger Ebert, which surprised me. It is underrated and didn't do very well, but I like lots of things about it. After that movie, I was burned out on directing, so I stopped cold for several years. I couldn't do it anymore. I had fallen out of love.

FANG: *Vampires: Los Muertos* (2002)…

CARPENTER: Tommy Lee wrote and directed that in Mexico, with Jon Bon Jovi starring in it. Making movies in Mexico is problematic.

FANG: *Masters of Horror: Cigarette Burns* (2005)…

CARPENTER: Mick Garris convinced us we'd all become billionaires if we did this series for Showtime, and of course none of us have seen anything from it. Fooled again. We went up for eight days and shot an hour's worth of film with a script that was really good. Udo Kier and Norman Reedus were great, my son did the score and I am proud of it.

FANG: *Masters of Horror: Pro-Life* (2006)…

CARPENTER: Same gig as *Cigarette Burns*—same writers and crew, with Ron Perlman [this time]. My son did the score again, and again, I am happy with it. It's easier to do one hour. You don't have to work as hard.

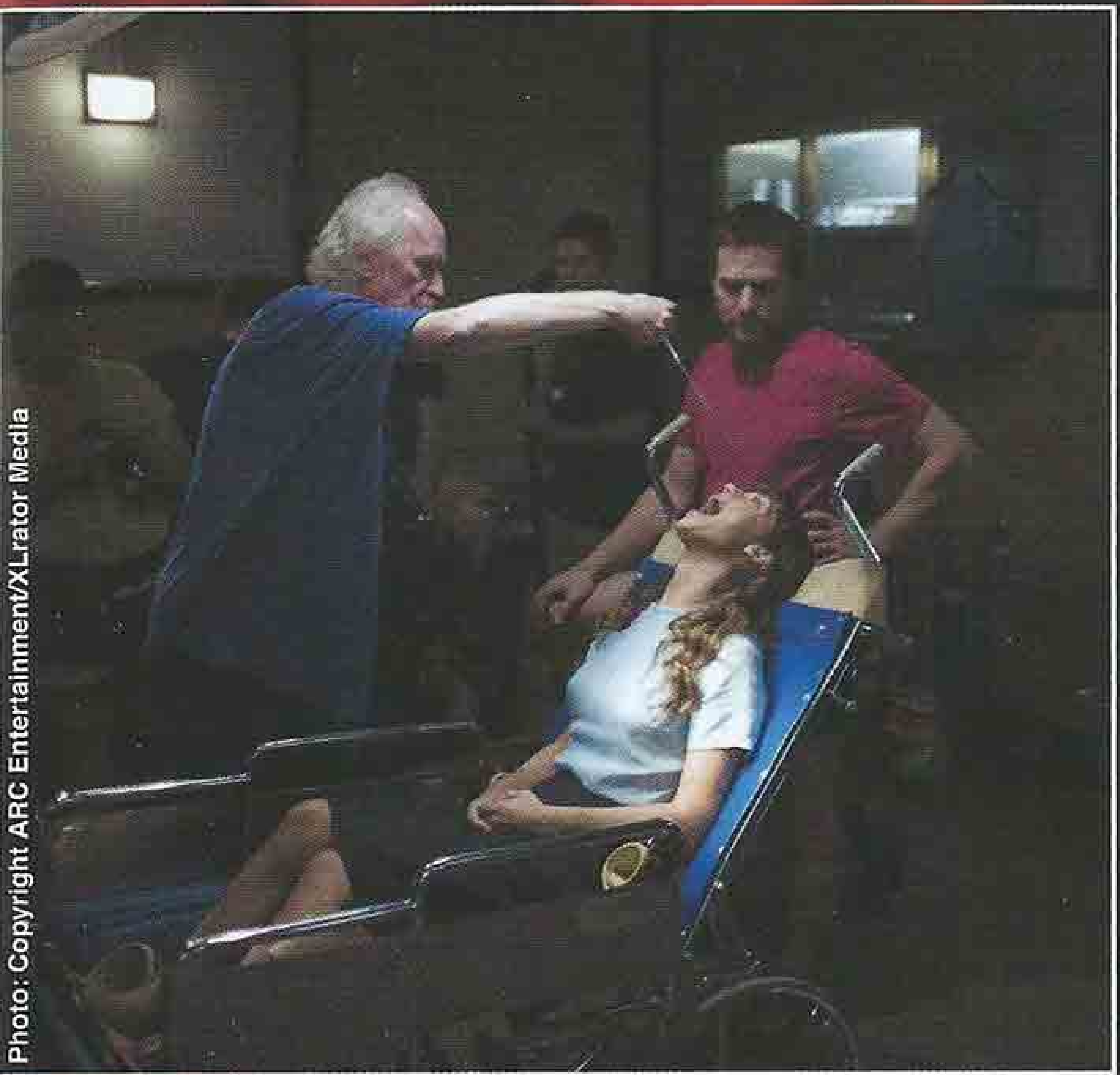


Photo: Copyright ARC Entertainment/XLrator Media

On *The Ward,* Carpenter helped his young cast keep their eyes on what was important.

FANG: *The Fog* (2005)…

CARPENTER: Ayyyyye. David Foster decided he wanted to do a remake of *The Fog*, and Rupert Wainwright directed it. They didn't listen to me, and had their own story, and by that point I didn't want to say anything. I collected a check, and it was number one [its opening weekend] at the box office.

FANG: *The Ward* (2011)…

CARPENTER: I signed with new management, who had a script they wanted to do about these girls in a mental institution. It was a chance to work with Amber Heard in Spokane, Washington for 30some days. I had never worked with an all-girl cast before, so that was a first. All the actresses were really talented. The movie is OK and has some nice moments.

FANG: *Darkchylde*…

CARPENTER: In development. The director right now is blind in one eye.

FANG: *Fangland*…

CARPENTER: That is a script I am attached to, but I never hear anything about it. All my career, nobody tells me anything. *Bloody Benders* is the same thing. That is a Western based on a serial-killer family in Illinois. There are a couple of other projects, but life has intruded, so I have to wait until the eye heals.

> **"Irwin Yablans had come up with this idea for [*Halloween*]. He wanted something that every teenager in America could relate to."**

FANG: The icon John Carpenter…

CARPENTER: He is just a guy who fell in love with movies and worked hard at making them. The one thing about the icon John Carpenter that never worked for the real John Carpenter was that he never got the chicks. He always had adolescent boys wanting to talk to him. He never got the groupies. You have dreams when you're young, but they don't necessarily come true. He made a few movies that people know.

FANG: The private John Carpenter…

CARPENTER: Retirement age is creeping up quickly. I have had a nice life, and am lucky in my career to have made some movies, made some money and now I'm comfortable. Real life is intruding—age issues. My dad is 92, so I keep an eye on him, and my mother-in-law is going through various things. This is stuff you don't worry about when you're a kid. I play around with "How has my career been?" but I don't think about it too much. I love basketball and video games. What more do you want? It is time for the real John Carpenter to kick back and relax. ○

Photo: Copyright Screen Gems

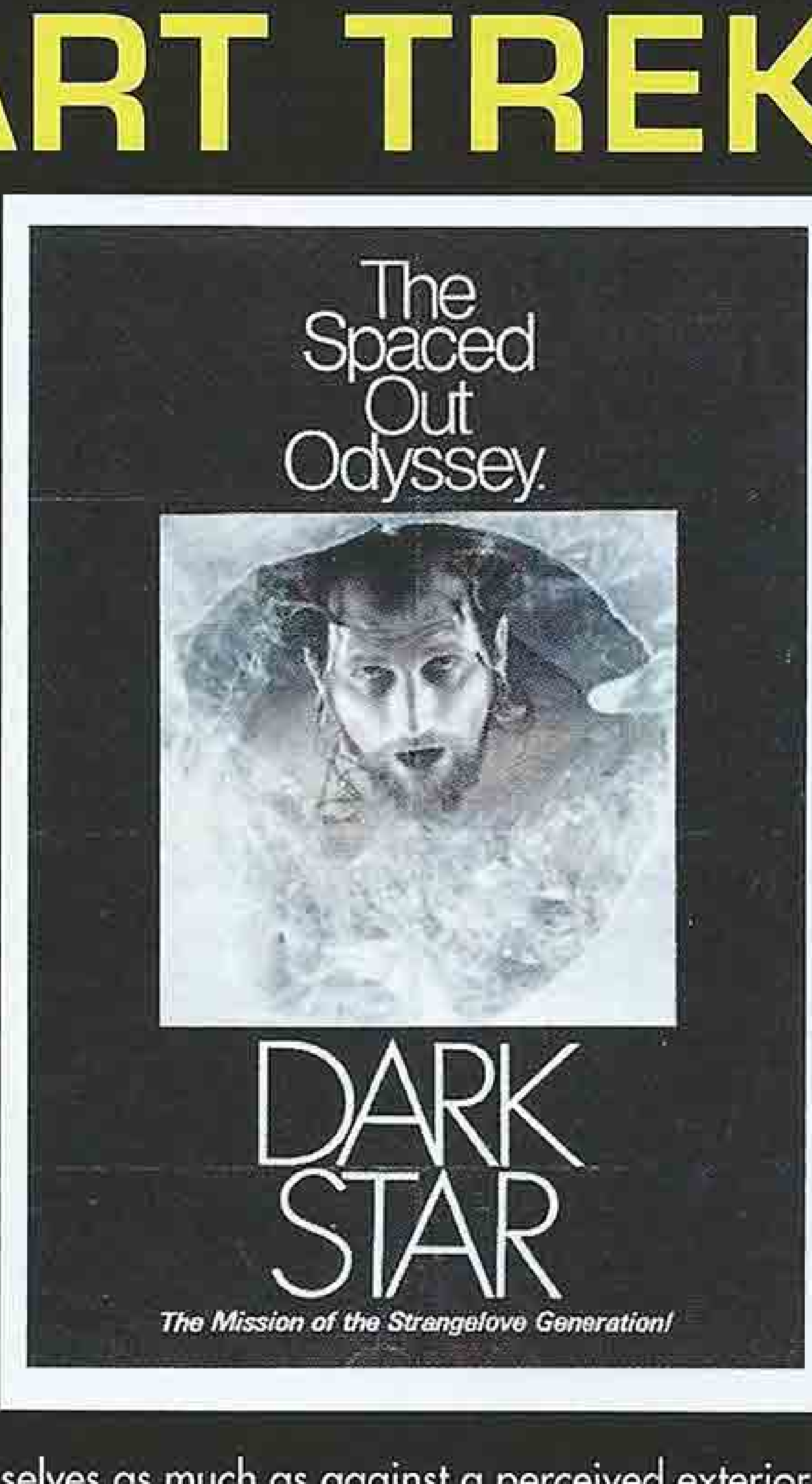
Jon Bon Jovi wanted vampires dead, not alive in *Los Muertos.*

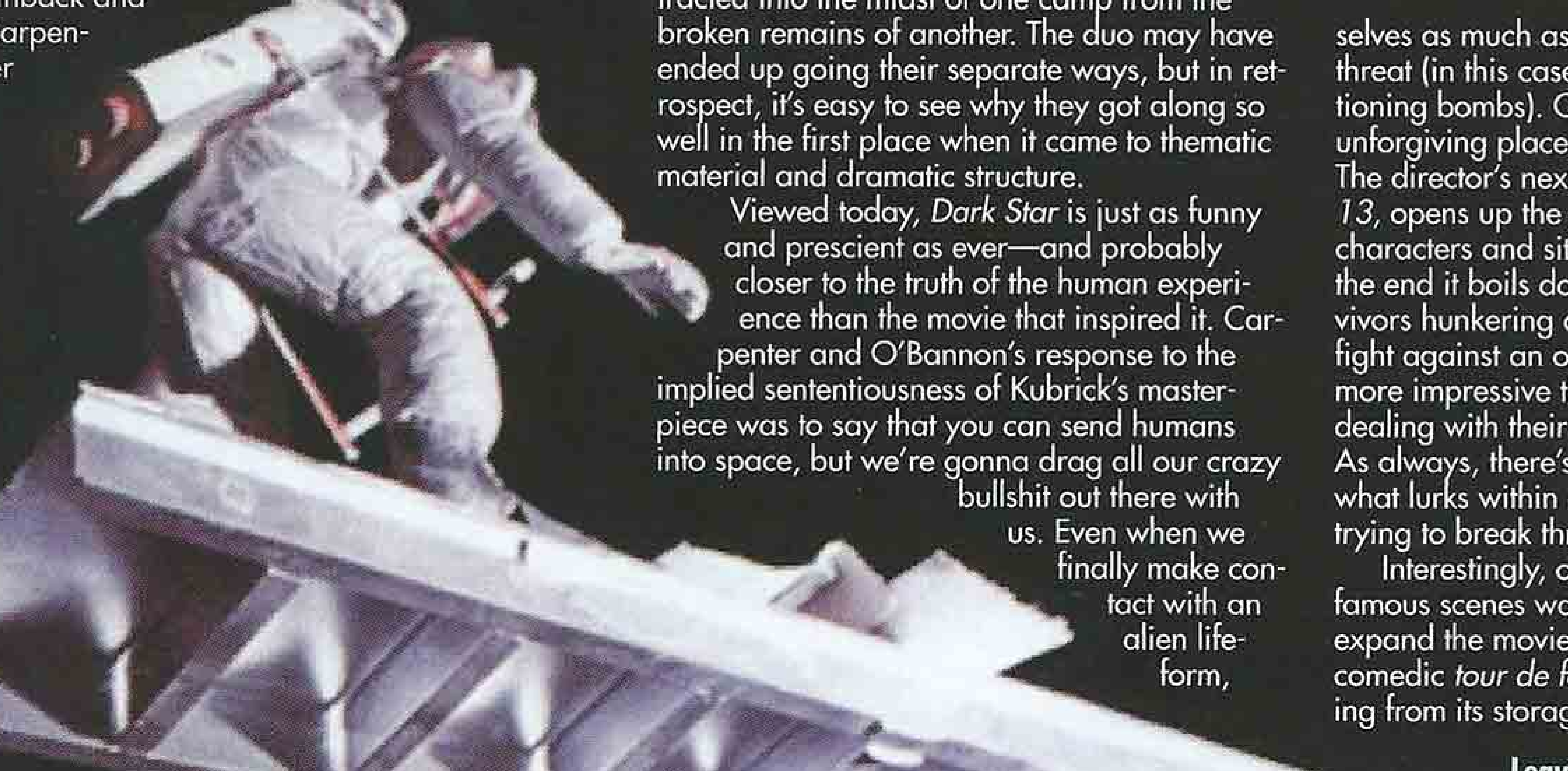
DARK STAR
CARPENTER'S START TREK

It's difficult to imagine the amount of filmmaking chutzpah necessary to sit down and decide that your first film—your Hollywood calling card—should be a darkly humorous sci-fi parody that pokes a playful finger at Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, one of the most respected space epics of all time. But essentially, John Carpenter's *Dark Star* is an almost slapstick, Bronx-cheer response to Kubrick's celebrated cerebral examination of humanity trying to cope in the vast cosmos of outer space. Though to be fair to the ambitions of Carpenter and cohort Dan O'Bannon, Kubrick himself had certainly taken a jab at the solemnity of nuclear conflagration with *Dr. Strangelove*—a corollary that one can only hope wasn't lost on Kubrick if, at some point, he actually happened to see *Dark Star*.

Dark Star's production history is long and convoluted, but the short version is that while attending USC's film school, Carpenter teamed up with friend O'Bannon in 1970 (two years after *2001*'s release) to make the ultimate student thesis film. They wrote the script together, O'Bannon played the lovably erratic Sgt. Pinback and Carpenter directed. Both of them also provided the funding and constructed the ingeniously inexpensive but imaginative sets, using oddly shaped Styrofoam packing material and backlit colored marbles to create their claustrophobic mission-control set. Through whatever fortuity surrounds a charmed (if somewhat cursed) project like this, special FX duties, also supervised by O'Bannon, fell to a group including such future luminaries as matte painter Jim Danforth, designer Ron Cobb and model builder Greg Jein, giving the movie a visual credibility that far outshines its $60,000 budget.

When the original filming was done, Carpenter and co. discovered they had a project that ran barely over an hour. With funding from eventual distributor Jack H. Harris, reshoots were undertaken to add scenes, and the 16mm feature was painstakingly blown up to 35mm for theatrical distribution in 1974. In the end, the intensity of making *Dark Star* broke up Carpenter and O'Bannon's professional and personal relationships, and it's sad to imagine all the missed opportunities these two great, creative minds would have given us had they continued working together.


The Spaced Out Odyssey.
DARK STAR
The Mission of the Strangelove Generation!



Leave it to Southern Californians to work surfing into a space movie.

If *2001* was derived from the existential darkness of Friedrich Nietzsche, *Dark Star* was spawned from the absurdity of playwright Samuel Beckett. And although this is a John Carpenter film, it is impossible not to see it as a successfully gene-spliced collaboration between Carpenter and O'Bannon, especially in light of the later works of both filmmakers. Perhaps the wide shots of actors reacting in a space for extended periods that one sometimes finds in Carpenter's films was an influence on O'Bannon's directorial debut, *The Return of the Living Dead*, with its meticulously choreographed shots that continue far longer than most audiences realize and reward attentive viewers with expertly crafted jokes and scares.

At the same time, the structure of O'Bannon's script for *Alien* can be seen as having influenced the unrelenting paranoia of Carpenter's *The Thing*, in which a xenomorph is contracted into the midst of one camp from the broken remains of another. The duo may have ended up going their separate ways, but in retrospect, it's easy to see why they got along so well in the first place when it came to thematic material and dramatic structure.

Viewed today, *Dark Star* is just as funny and prescient as ever—and probably closer to the truth of the human experience than the movie that inspired it. Carpenter and O'Bannon's response to the implied sententiousness of Kubrick's masterpiece was to say that you can send humans into space, but we're gonna drag all our crazy bullshit out there with us. Even when we finally make contact with an alien lifeform, *Dark Star* posits that it'll be little more than a semi-intelligent gas-filled ball with clawed feet that's treated like a nuisance pet to be fed and cleaned up after. And if there's anything more brilliantly absurd than a man arguing phenomenological thinking with a semi-intelligent bomb about to detonate and kill everybody, I ain't seen it. In a modern world filled with drone attacks controlled from thousands of miles away by U.S. soldiers with the equivalent of video-game controllers, *Dark Star*'s "smart bombs" don't seem as far-fetched and comedic as they did nearly 40 years ago.

In the basic premise, we have the template for many Carpenter films to follow, as four men are trapped inside the confined environment of a spaceship and end up fighting amongst themselves as much as against a perceived exterior threat (in this case, one of their ship's malfunctioning bombs). Outer space is a cold and unforgiving place, even in a comedy like this. The director's next project, *Assault on Precinct 13*, opens up the playing field a bit for more characters and situations, but like *The Thing*, in the end it boils down to a small group of survivors hunkering down in a single location to fight against an outside force (this time slightly more impressive than a living beach ball) while dealing with their own troubled interactions. As always, there's as much implied threat from what lurks within as the tangibly real dangers trying to break through the barrier without.

Interestingly, one of *Dark Star*'s most famous scenes was part of the reshoots done to expand the movie to feature length. This comedic *tour de force* involves the alien escaping from its storage compartment and wreaking havoc as Pinback attempts to subdue it and return it to captivity. This extended chase is pretty successfully milked for both comedy and suspense, and is a tribute not only to Carpenter's skills as a young filmmaker, but also to O'Bannon's performance, as well as his physical endurance, since performing in the airshaft set—built at an angle, so he was actually lying on his back instead of standing on his feet—was so punishing that he nearly ended up in traction.

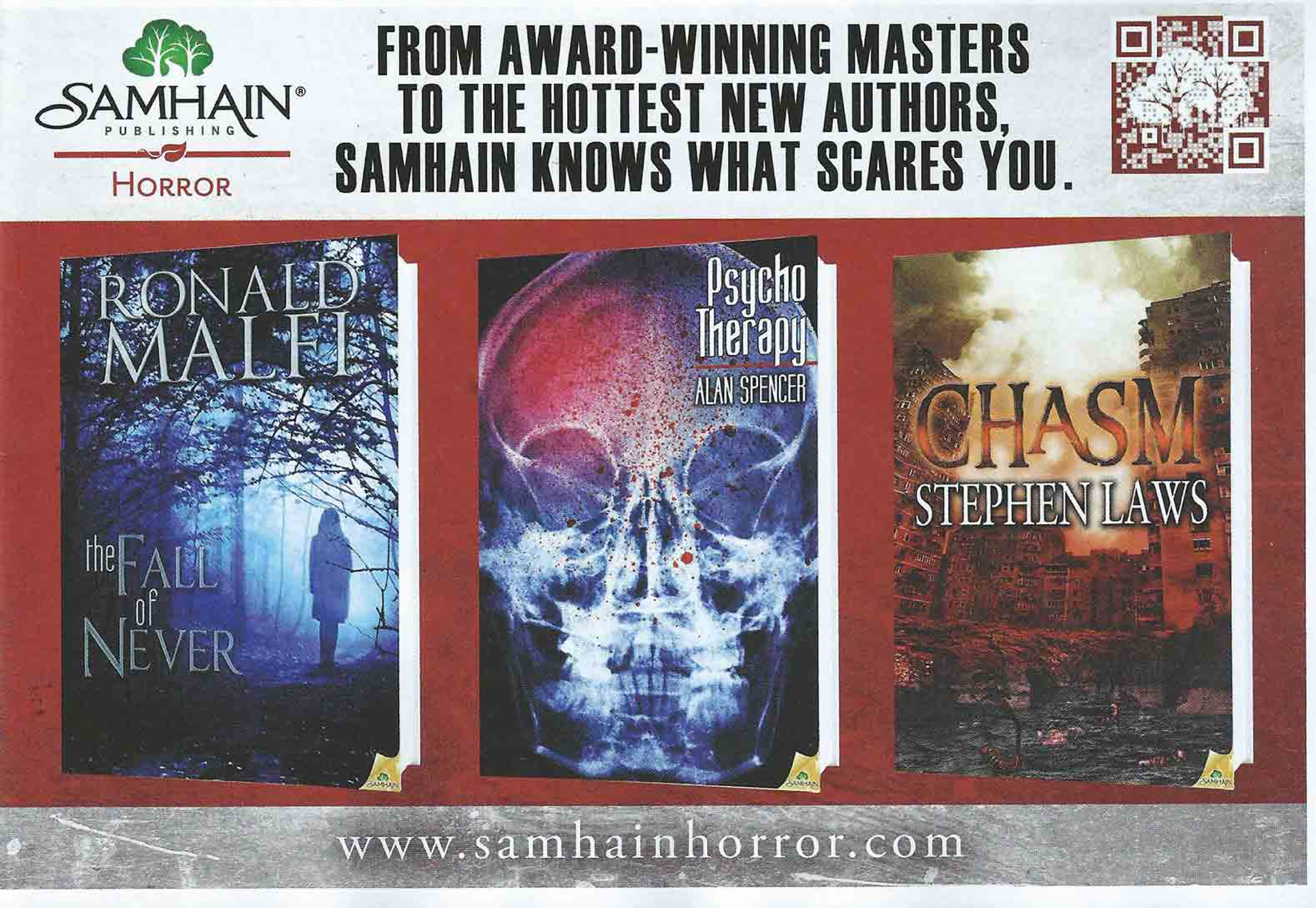
This was also the first of many films that Carpenter scored himself (here assisted by the synthesizer-programming skills of Dan

In an era of serious sci-fi, *Dark Star* explored the lighter side of interstellar travel.

Wyman, his collaborator through *The Fog*), and established the electronic template that would define most of the rest of his composing career. It's a spare but effective soundtrack that works perfectly with the impressive-in-a-shoebox visuals.

Dark Star's explosive climax, brought about by the self-realization of Bomb 20, perfectly foreshadows the many dark endings lying ahead in Carpenter's filmography, while also providing a perfect example of how a filmmaker can employ recurring images throughout his career that simply could not have been consciously preplanned. After the *Dark Star* explodes, leaving two survivors communicating via their space helmets while being thrown to their deaths in opposite directions, they both comment on how Commander Powell—who was kept alive in a frozen state after a critical accident—is the lucky one who will survive them all as he hurtles through space in his block of ice—such a block being the core image that starts all the trouble in *The Thing*, made some eight years later. If you're a Carpenter fan who's never seen this early classic, it is definitely worth seeking out to enjoy on its own merits, and also as a missing link that helps connect the dots between almost everything that came afterward in the director's career.

—Scooter McCrae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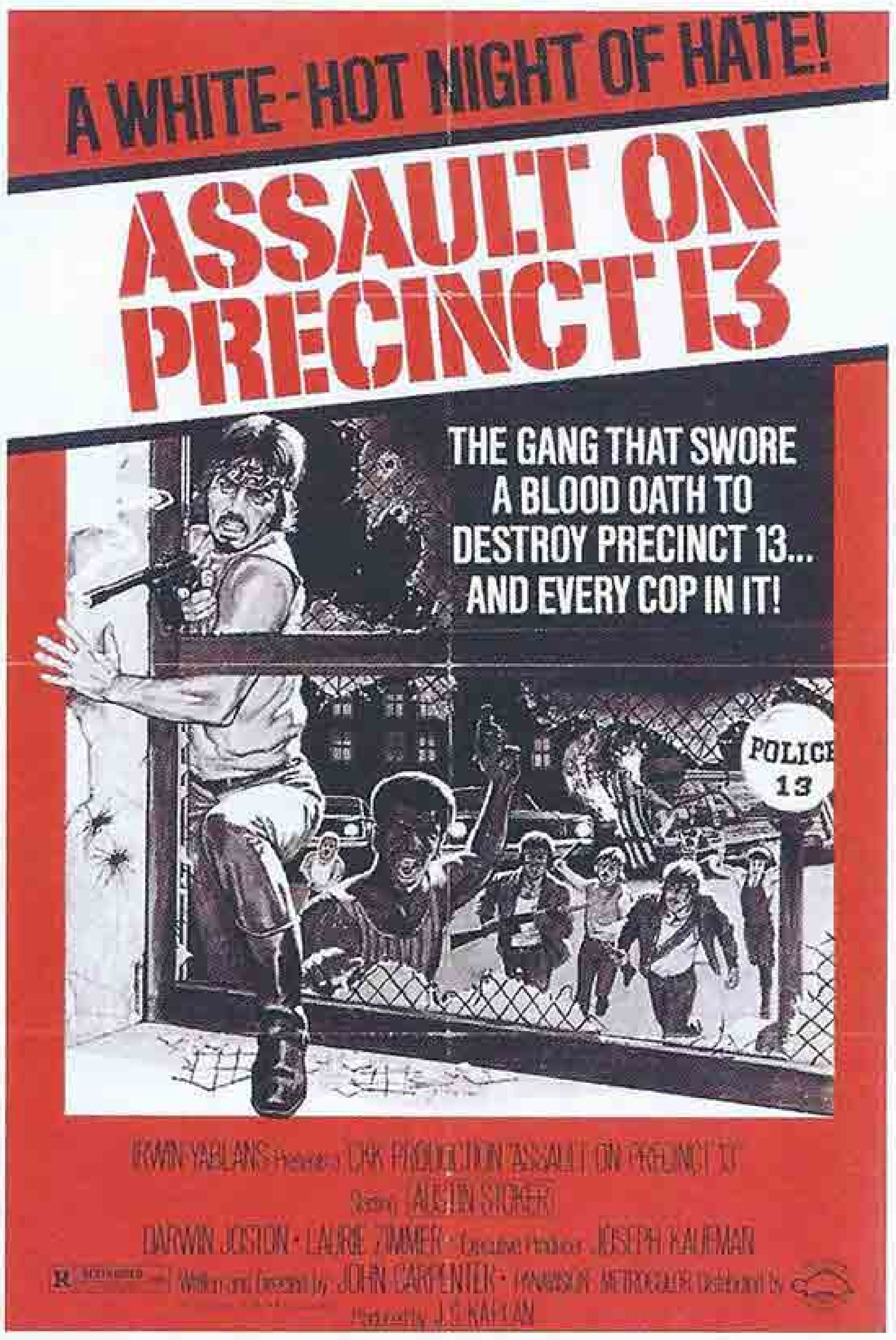
ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13

Like gangbusters

What do you do when you're a fledgling filmmaker itching to make a Western, but lack the money to tackle that form? If you're John Carpenter, you loosely adapt Howard Hawks' John Wayne-starring classic *Rio Bravo* into a script called *The Anderson Alamo* that can be filmed on the mean streets of Los Angeles on a $100,000 budget, and expertly craft an action-thriller that launches your big-screen career.

In *Rio Bravo*, the Duke portrayed Sheriff John T. Chance, who takes on a gang of armed men trying to spring a murderer from jail, with only a motley group of compatriots to help him. Carpenter's urban version, released as *Assault on Precinct 13* (even though it actually takes place at Precinct 9, Division 13), makes a couple of crucial changes that give the proceedings the aura of a horror film. Unlike Hawks' unlikely heroes, the skeleton crew defending an isolated LA police station in the process of closing down in Carpenter's movie never know why they're being besieged, and their attackers are not defined characters but a faceless, seemingly endless mob of street-gang members who suggest a faster, better-armed variation on the zombie hordes of *Night of the Living Dead*—another of Carpenter's acknowledged inspirations.


A WHITE-HOT NIGHT OF HATE!
ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13
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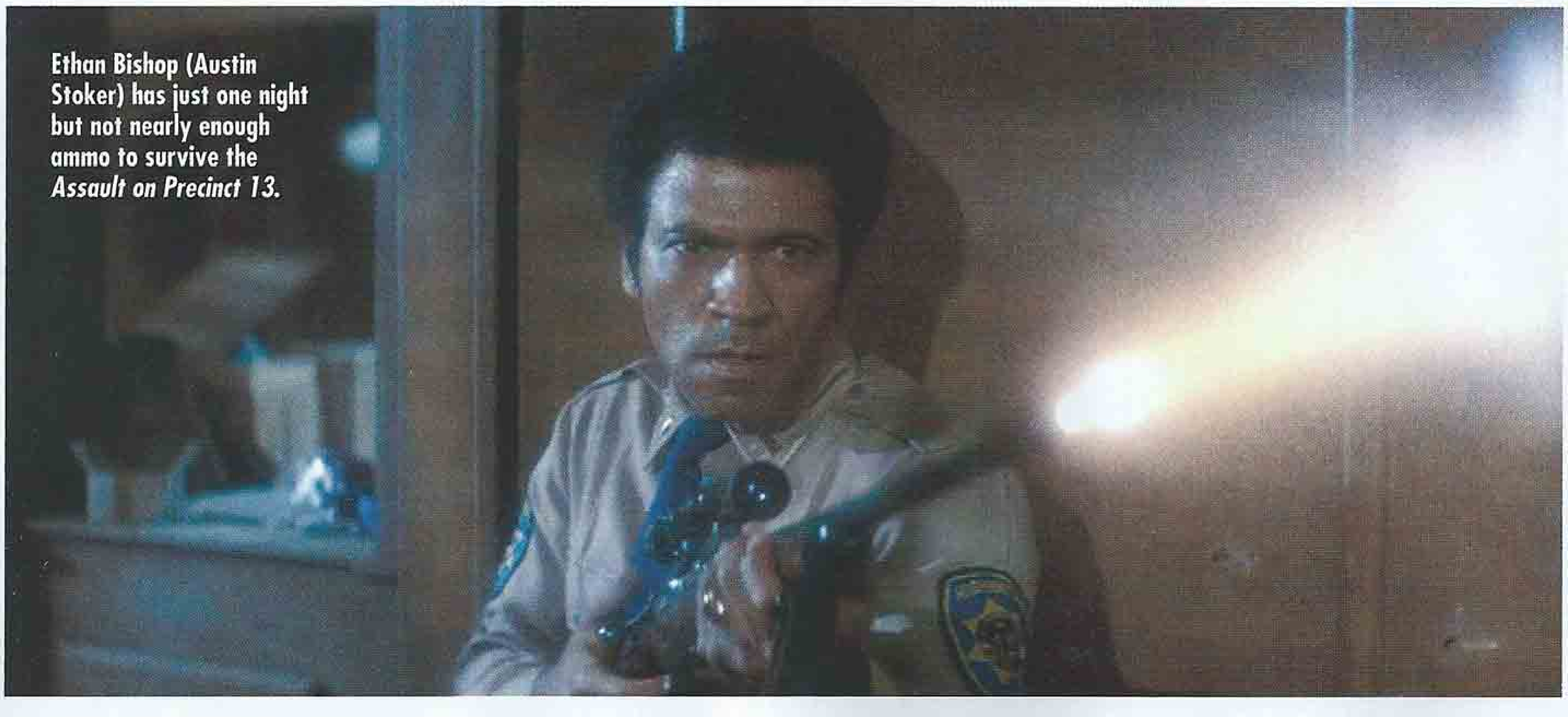
JOSEPH KAUFMAN
JOHN CARPENTER
J.S. KAPLAN

A further way in which *Assault* echoes *Night* is in its casting of an African-American actor (Austin Stoker as just-promoted police lieutenant Ethan Bishop) in the heroic lead, yet with the color of his skin beside the point. The potential for racial differences arises and is just as quickly defused when secretary Leigh (Laurie Zimmer) makes coffee for Bishop: "Black?" she asks, to which he replies with a smile, "For about 30 years." While they and their compatriots aren't privy to the events that incite the gang, we are, and they begin with a truly horrific act: the cold-blooded shooting of a little girl, even more shocking as she was played by fresh-faced Disney moppet Kim Richards. (No doubt her gruesomely ironic casting was intentional, as Richards recalls Carpenter virtually stalking her to sign her for the film after her agent had turned him down.) Her father in turn kills the warlord responsible (Frank Doubleday, who would reappear, all punked out, in *Escape from New York*); his "brothers" follow the fleeing dad to the station house, and the action begins.

The intense situation forces the cops and convicts stuck together inside to drop their differences and band together for survival, with Bishop forming an especially strong alliance with cocky criminal Napoleon Wilson (Darwin Joston). Wilson's repeated request "Anybody got a smoke?" becomes a running joke in a film that finds just enough ways to leaven the tension with humor, as when a crucial, life-or-death decision is arrived at by having those involved play "potatoes." The violence, however, is deadly serious, with startling bursts of blood erupting from victims (kudos to Richard Albain Jr.'s special FX), and somehow scarier for being accompanied not by loud gunshots, but by the sharp whispers of silencers. Richards' murder was upsetting enough to inspire the MPAA to demand cuts before the film would be awarded an R—though Carpenter, after making the trims and winning that rating, sent the uncut movie to theaters anyway.

Lost amongst its many fellow low-budget genre pictures in the States, *Assault on Precinct 13* found greater rewards overseas; its success in England paved the way for *Halloween*, which took its villain's name from the film's British distributor, Michael Myers. Even as *Assault* similarly pays homage to Carpenter favorites of the past (he took "John T. Chance" as a pseudonym for his editing credit, Leigh's last name is Brackett, after *Rio Bravo*'s scripter, etc.), it also set the template for many of the director's films to come. From *The Thing* to *Prince of Darkness* to *Ghosts of Mars*, he has always been fascinated by studies of isolated groups of people, and how they react to the threat of malevolent, seemingly unstoppable enemies. And with its skillful use of widescreen and impactful presentation of violence—even a scene in which an empty room is shot up is intense—Carpenter demonstrated at this very early stage that he was a filmmaker who knew exactly what he was doing.

—Michael Gingold



Ethan Bishop (Austin Stoker) has just one night but not nearly enough ammo to survive the *Assault on Precinct 13*.

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HALLOWEEN

An enduring treat

It's no trick—Jamie Lee Curtis' enormously sympathetic performance grounds *Halloween*'s horrors.

What more can be said, ultimately, about *Halloween*—a film whose out-of-nowhere success, immense impact and undying legacy have been endlessly discussed and dissected? Perhaps only this: It is a movie that, if it doesn't resist such analysis, certainly doesn't invite or require it. Burrowing into its undertones to examine its subtext can be intellectually intriguing and rewarding, but doesn't necessarily add to the movie's impact. What the film does so well is right on the surface, no elucidation necessary. It is pure, it is primal and it is terrifying.

Halloween was a game-changer for horror cinema—indeed, for movies in general—and its fans. It was the apex of the rise of independent scare films that began 10 years prior with *Night of the Living Dead* and continued with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*—both big successes, to be sure, but not quite the way *Halloween* was. *Night* and *Chainsaw* felt like movies that had crawled up from some dark celluloid netherworld to rub our faces in grain, grit and grime. *Halloween* was different—thanks to John Carpenter's skill and Debra Hill's producing savvy, it was as polished and slick in its widescreen imagery as any Hollywood product, and both its villain and his crimes seemed almost genteel when compared to George A. Romero's ghouls and Tobe Hooper's family of cannibals. *Night* and *Chainsaw* were drive-in pictures, grindhouse flicks, midnight movies—name your cliché. *Halloween* could co-exist with studio product at the "hardtops."

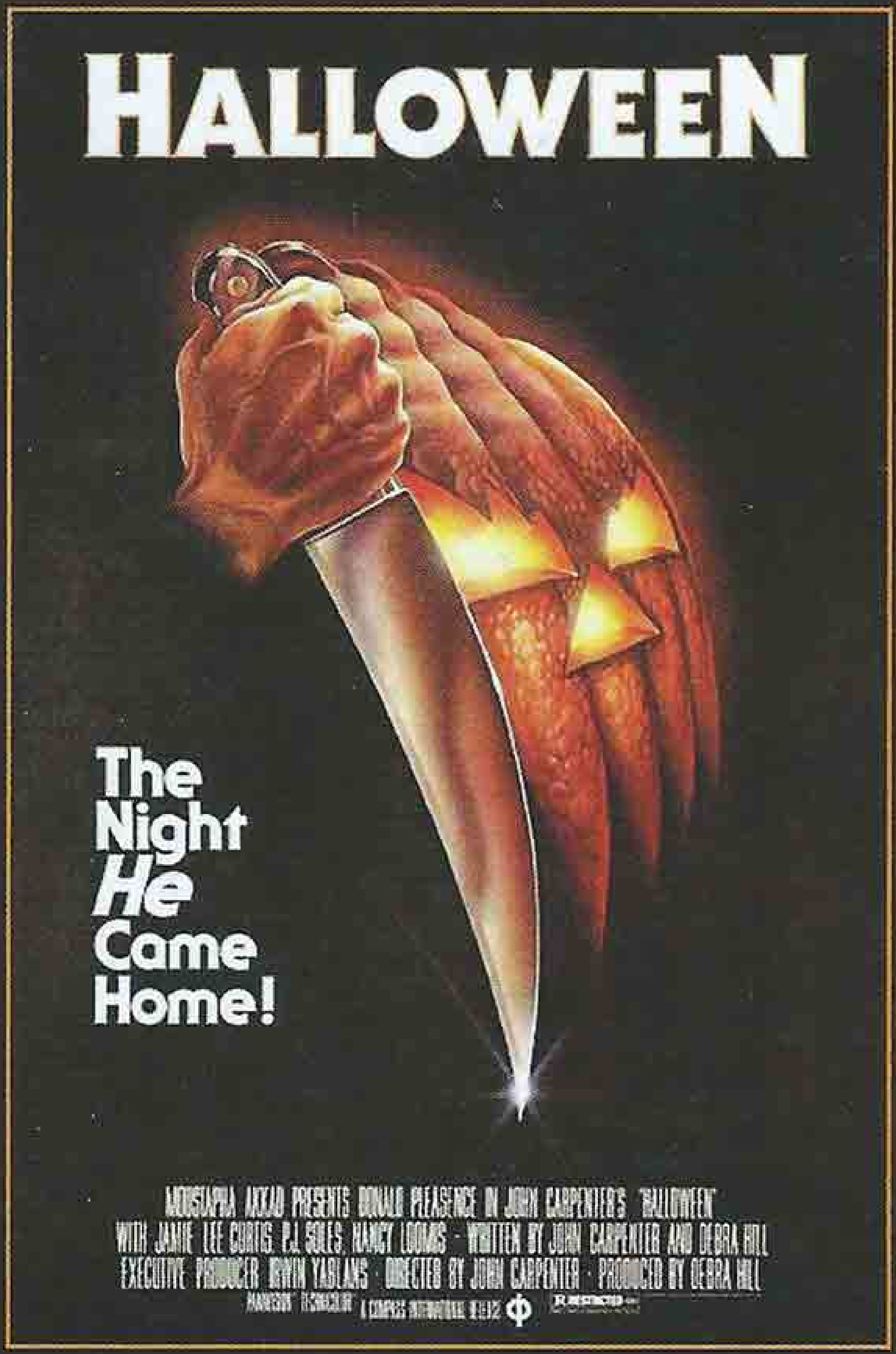
Neither the law (Charles Cyphers' Sheriff Brackett) nor professional help (Donald Pleasence's Dr. Sam Loomis) can save you on this night.

And yet, there was still something outlaw about it, the sense that this wasn't going to be "safe" in the way big-studio horror was. You knew that right from the start, as those orange-on-black credits played out alongside the smirking jack o'lantern while Carpenter's simple but deadly effective score haunted the theater. Seriously, when had you ever been scared before by the *music* before the movie proper even started? Then there was that remarkable opening tracking shot, the likes of which had rarely been seen in a genre film, taking you into the house, picking up the knife, heading upstairs as the clock tolled 10 and then confronting you with the first-person murder of a half-naked girl. You were impressed by the filmmaking savvy at the same time you were shivering from anticipation and then shocked by the bluntness of the killing—and the implication of seeing it through the villain's eyes. And then, the kicker: the reverse-shot revelation that the murderer is a little boy as the camera dramatically rises over the scene. Damn.

The last couple of generations, who have grown up with the endless sequels, remakes, homages and appropriation of *Halloween*'s tropes to the point of cliché, might not be able to appreciate just how striking and scary it was to see the film for the first time. I initially caught it, at a young, impressionable age, when it returned to theaters in October 1979, and had been prepared somewhat by the critical raves proudly excerpted on the rerelease's newspaper ads. Contrary to what some—including Carpenter himself—have claimed, *Halloween* engendered critical support right from the start, winning praise from the likes of *Newsweek* ("the most frightening flick in years"), *New Times* magazine ("a superb demonstration of filmmaking artistry") and both Roger Ebert ("an absolutely merciless thriller…a terrifying and creepy film") and Gene Siskel ("a beautifully made thriller…that will have you screaming with regularity").

But those were just words. Sitting in that dark theater, watching Jamie Lee Curtis and her friends go about their teenage business and *knowing* terrible things were going to happen to them once the eponymous night fell, I was gnawed by a dread unlike anything I had heretofore experienced in the handful of horror films I'd seen in theaters, or the ones I'd caught on late-night TV. Then the girls got to their babysitting jobs, Michael began stepping out of the darkness and the rest was 45 minutes or so of sheer terror. Some of it was traditional jump-scare stuff, albeit finely honed and perfectly timed for maximum impact. That amounted to punctuation, however, for an overwhelming sense of anxiety that could be felt permeating the whole audience, who let it out by screaming at those jolts and yelling for Laurie to run, get back

Halloween masks had never been as scary as when Michael Myers first wore one back in '78.


HALLOWEEN
The Night He Came Home!
MOUSTAPHA AKKAD PRESENTS DONALD PLEASENCE IN JOHN CARPENTER'S "HALLOWEEN"
WITH JAMIE LEE CURTIS, P.J. SOLES, NANCY LOOMIS · WRITTEN BY JOHN CARPENTER AND DEBRA HILL
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER IRWIN YABLANS · DIRECTED BY JOHN CARPENTER · PRODUCED BY DEBRA HILL
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inside and for God's sake, *turn around!*

I left that showing having been put through the wringer, worn out emotionally and still shaking a little. And yet I was also elated—not just at having "survived," but from experiencing a film that had moved me beyond what I was used to. I hadn't just watched *Halloween*, I had *felt* it, and sharing it with the rest of the shrieking crowd had only enhanced the experience. And it played fair; the movie had been merciless, but not sadistic. It didn't dwell on suffering or bloodshed, but rather got me caught up with a group of decent people who have the terrible misfortune to cross paths with a man who, in the memorable words of Donald Pleasence's Dr. Sam Loomis, is "purely and simply…evil." And it did so without forcing me into the murderer's shoes; although *Halloween* has been credited—and maligned—for starting the trend of the camera adopting the killer's point of view (setting aside the fact that Bob Clark did it first in *Black Christmas*), Carpenter doesn't actually play any scenes through Michael Myers' eyes after the prologue. Really, he doesn't—watch the movie again, and you'll see.

Film critic B. Ruby Rich once wrote about the difference between "open" and "closed" movie horror. "Closed" horror, however effective, involves people in situations the audience could never find themselves in—the space travelers in *Alien*, for example. "Open" horror, on the other hand, happens to people like you or me, in recognizable surroundings, and literally hits you where you live. *Halloween* does that, in spades. You don't have to check into the Bates Motel, or take a road trip into the wilds of Texas, to encounter this maniac; he's coming for you, lurking behind hedges or in the shadows of typical suburban streets, and it's a key plot device that, a brief early scene excepted, he doesn't hang around Haddonfield's "haunted house." Executive producer Irwin Yablans knew he was onto something when he came up with the concept he originally titled *The Babysitter Murders;* as he told *New York* magazine, "There's a common denominator there, I thought—everybody's been a babysitter, or everybody's had one."

Yablans recalled in that interview that Carpenter was only "somewhat enthusiastic" about the idea at first—until the producer had the brainstorm that the movie should take place entirely on one particular night. It seems remarkable now that no one had previously thought to set a horror film on Halloween, much less name it after the holiday, and it proved to be the perfect touch, setting up macabre expectations right in the title and providing ready-made, easily identifiable iconography. The poster design of a knife's blade blending with the surface of a carved pumpkin was perfect—and prophetic, as stalking and slashing, thanks to Carpenter's movie and all the imitators that followed, are probably as closely identified with Halloween now as jack o'lanterns.

It's hard for this horror fan to believe that it has been 35 years since *Halloween* first began frightening people across the U.S. and then the world, setting trends that are still being followed today, launching careers and encouraging so many people to pursue horror as a vocation—myself included. *Halloween* made me realize that I loved being scared, and put me on a course to turn that affection into a career. Without it, for more than one reason, I might not have wound up writing the words you're reading in this very magazine.

—Michael Gingold

John Carpenter's sneaky framing had audiences watching the backgrounds as much as the actors (including Nancy Loomis).

HALLOWEEN HOTTIE

P.J. Soles was very good at playing a bad girl in Carpenter's trendsetting frightfest.

By MICHAEL GINGOLD

Photo: Michael Gingold

In *Halloween*, P.J. Soles' sexy, spunky Lynda provides the perfect balancing presence between Jamie Lee Curtis' shy, observant Laurie Strode and Nancy Loomis' brash, cynical Annie. John Carpenter's slasher smash was also the pivot point of Soles' triumvirate of late-'70s cult favorites, coming two years after she served as Nancy Allen's mean-girl sidekick in Brian De Palma's *Carrie* and a year before her turn as ultimate Ramones fan Riff Randell in Allan Arkush's *Rock 'n' Roll High School*. We caught up with Soles to get her reminiscences on making maniac magic…

FANGORIA: What are your memories of working with John Carpenter on *Halloween*?

P.J. SOLES: I just remember that John was such a young guy that I thought, "Oh my God, he's amazing," because besides being the director and the co-writer, it was ultimately revealed at the cast and crew screening that he had written and performed the now-famous soundtrack. I thought he was a genius, and I adored him and Debra Hill from the beginning, when I did my audition. That was only with him, which in those days was very unusual; usually you went through the casting person and were put on film or video, and it was a pretty critical process. But he just read me himself, and told me right then and there, "You've got the part if you want it." I said, "Yeah!" and he said, "Well, then stay here and pick out your boyfriend."

So from the get-go, it was, "I like this guy. He knows what he wants, he gets it and then we proceed." It was the same with filming, just one or two takes. That probably had more to do with the budget than anything else, but I like working that way, and he knew how to get what he wanted on film and move on. I just remember him being extremely focused and pleasant to work with—a really, really nice guy.

FANG: Just before *Halloween*, you costarred in *Carrie*, a comparatively bigger-budgeted horror film for a studio; how did that experience compare to doing a small movie like *Halloween*?

"I was very different [from Lynda]; I was a straight-A student, more like Laurie Strode in real life."

SOLES: Well, in terms of our salaries, it was the same [*laughs*]. I guess *Carrie* was favored-nation, which meant everybody got the same amount; I think it was $600 a week. But *Carrie* was my first film, and *Halloween* was my second, so I didn't really think about big-budget and low-budget in those days as a young actress. It was the part, who you were working with, the script, what the whole atmosphere was like. But *Halloween* was definitely a more intimate little set, as opposed to filming *Carrie* at the Culver Studios with 16 cast members and glorious wardrobe people. On *Halloween*, we all did our own wardrobe. We did have makeup and hair, but we moved around a lot, though it was definitely a good spirit.

In terms of John, it was more fun because of that intimate setting. Brian De Palma was a bit more aloof; he wasn't

It's last call for Lynda (P.J. Soles) when a ghost from Haddonfield's past catches up to her.

A typical suburban house becomes a death trap for Lynda and Bob (John Michael Graham).

really an actor's director and didn't talk to you about your character, and he sort of trusted everybody to do their thing. As much as John did too, if you had a question, you could ask him, whereas with Brian, I think he cared more about what the shot looked like than what your feelings were [*laughs*].

FANG: *Halloween* has an intimacy with its characters as well, including those long, naturalistic takes where the camera travels down the streets with you, Jamie Lee Curtis and Nancy Loomis. Was there a freedom in just being out in the open like that?

SOLES: Yeah, and that was the first experience a lot of us had with the Panaglide rig. I guess John had gone to USC's film school with Ray Stella, who operated the Panaglide, and I was like, "Wow! You can just put that on your chest and walk around and follow us?" That made it very realistic, those long, sweeping walks, and it was very exciting for us, because there's nothing better for an actress than to have an extended scene. You know, a lot of theater people complain about that: "You say one line, then cut and you go to the next"; you can't have a flow or the feeling of a completed scene. That made it a lot more fun. Of course, we had to keep moving the [dead] leaves; I'm sure you've heard that. Our leaves had to keep moving with us [*laughs*], because it was supposed to be fall, and we were in Pasadena, not Illinois.

FANG: Did you have any inkling while you were making *Halloween* that you were doing something special, and that Carpenter was kind of reinventing the horror genre?

SOLES: Well, like I said, in those days, I was a young actress who wasn't thinking in those terms. Of course now, in hindsight, I get asked that a lot: "Did you know it was going to be something great?" But when I read the script, it didn't seem like, "Oh my gosh, a Hemingway novel!" It was like, "OK, this is fun, I can play this teenage girl," even though I was nothing like her. I was very different, a straight-A student; I was more like Laurie Strode in real life. But the sense I got was that John and Debra were a great team, and Dean Cundey, who also ended up shooting *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, was obviously a great DP, and we felt we were working with extremely talented people. At that time, I didn't think, "Oh, this is gonna last 30-40 years" or "These people, they're starting a new genre—or restarting a genre."

Halloween Photos: Copyright Compass International

Halloween **heroines Soles, Nancy Loomis and Jamie Lee Curtis provided three very distinct personalities stalked by a very damaged one.**

FANG: What are your memories of Jamie Lee Curtis?

SOLES: Just that it was her first movie—she was 19—and she kept grabbing at me and saying, "You have a better part! I have the boring part! [*Laughs*] I hate playing Laurie Strode! I wanna play Lynda! I'm more like Lynda!" We were very close friends on that, and she was very sweet. She had dated Bobby Carradine, who was a friend of mine; I helped raise his daughter Ever Carradine, who is now an actress, because he was a single dad. Jamie was a fun girl, and we had a very good time.

FANG: Have you been in touch with Carpenter over the years? Has there ever been a possibility of the two of you collaborating again?

SOLES: I don't know if we'll work together again, because the scripts these days are always about young people. Things come up here and there, like Rob Zombie had me in *The Devil's Rejects*, which was lovely, so hopefully… I have seen John frequently at conventions; since he started doing them, they'll put us in the same room, and sometimes we'll go to dinner. But it's funny—when I'm at conventions with my co-stars from all the different movies, it's like time hasn't passed. It's like a high-school reunion; you're back with your friends and the feelings are the same. John has never mentioned anything, and I don't know what he's working on, but I'm sure if there's a part that's right for me, he'll think of me—right, John [*laughs*]? ○

THE FOG

Not to be mist

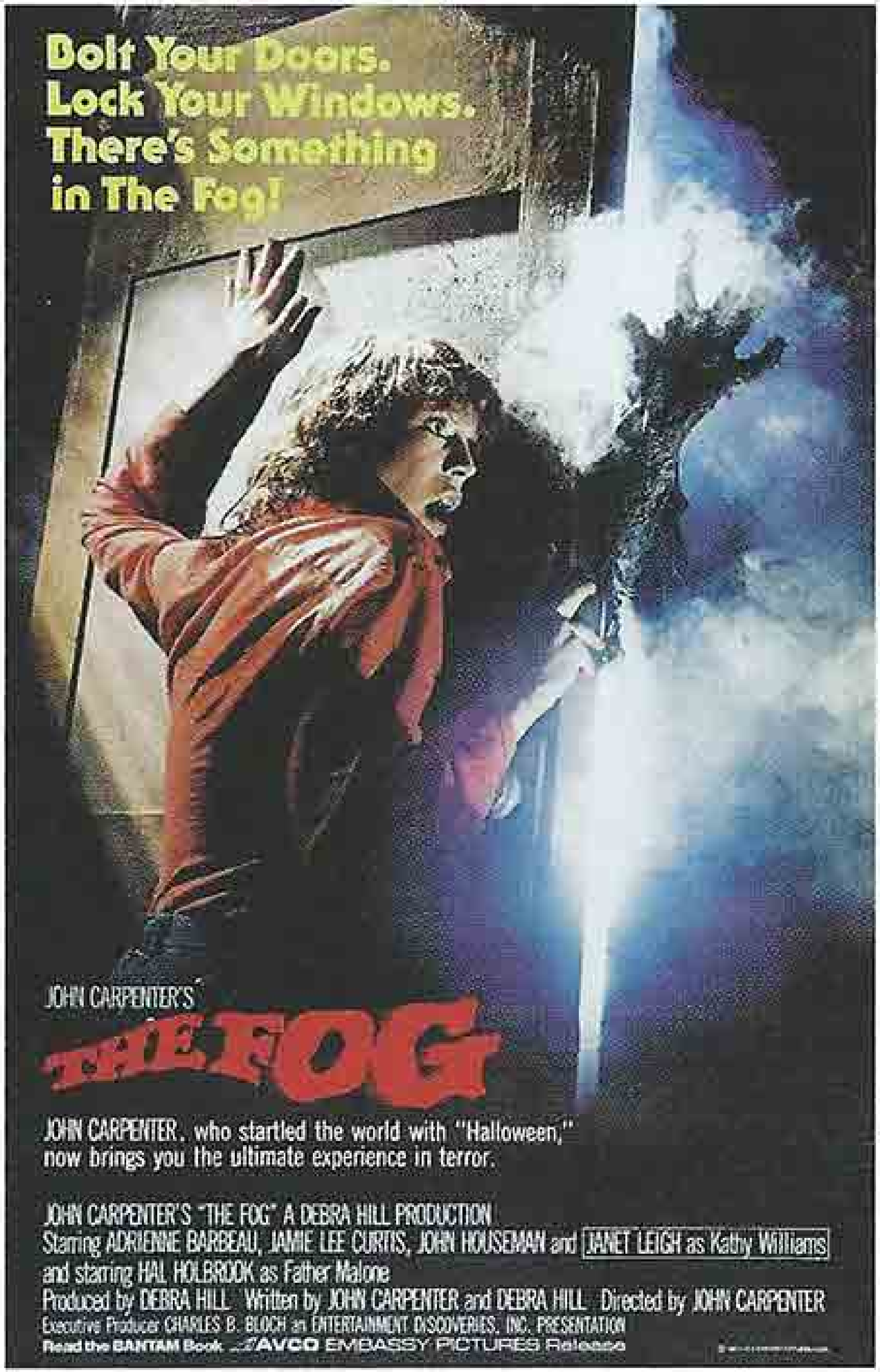
Among the many annoyances attending the hopeless 2005 remake of *The Fog* were a number of its critics' references to the original as a "lesser" or "minor" film in John Carpenter's canon. Even upon its initial 1980 release, some onlookers acted let down by the director's follow-up to his quickly-becoming-classic *Halloween*. Revisiting *The Fog* today, one can, in fact, sense the seeds of their disappointment—yet also recognize what a fine film it is in its own, individual right.

The Fog is not as relentless in its terror as *Halloween*, nor is it as precocious an exercise in style; it is, overall, a very different movie from its predecessor, which is probably what put off those expecting a more analogous encore. There's no single bravura demonstration of technique like the long-take opening from Michael's point of view, and in general, Carpenter and Dean Cundey's mobile *Halloween* camerawork is replaced by a more classical, composed approach. Which makes sense, because what they and producer/co-scripter Debra Hill are doing here is basically telling a ghost story.

And what better way to open such a film than by having one of our greatest actors, John Houseman, deliver a spooky tale on screen? The prologue, in which Houseman's Mr. Machen (named for Welsh supernatural author Arthur Machen) relates the fate of the sailing ship *Elizabeth Dane* and her crew to a group of wide-eyed kids around a campfire, not only perfectly delivers all the exposition we need to understand the subsequent events, it sets a tone of eerie promise and provides a fun moment of self-reflection; the children's rapt attention to Machen's words echoes our own involvement out in the audience.

As it turns out, the *Dane* and her passengers were real, and they are coming back—and what's more, they were lepers, so you can only imagine how much worse they'll look after a century at the bottom of the ocean. And imagine is what you have to do, as Carpenter, continuing the restraint he demonstrated in *Halloween*, only offers teasing hints of their icky visages, and keeps the gore mostly off-screen when they begin claiming human lives. (No doubt this prior reticence with the blood helped feed the disdain that greeted the explosions of grue in *The Thing*.) The director goes instead for old-fashioned, slow-burning creepiness, and in the fog itself, he has a perfect vehicle. The white mist that heralds the ghosts' invasion of the seaside town of Antonio Bay engulfs beaches, slithers down streets and envelops houses with a quiet implacability that—as was Carpenter's ambition—makes it a character in its own right.

It also figures into some of Cundey's most gorgeously evocative widescreen frames, particularly a long nighttime shot of the backlit fog enshrouding a home, the specters' menacing silhouettes advancing from within it, while a pickup speeds away in the foreground. Other memorable imagery attends the job of protagonist Stevie Wayne as a DJ at a picturesque lighthouse radio station, where she will attempt to warn her neighbors about the very active townwide haunting. Still one of Carpenter's most memorable heroines, Stevie is given a resilient and relatable reading by Adrienne Barbeau (who, with her husky voice, was born to play a radio host), heading an ensemble comprised of both *Halloween* alumni (Nancy Loomis, Charles Cyphers) and newcomers to the Carpenter fold (Hal Holbrook, Tom Atkins and Houseman). Representatives of each camp comprise the canniest casting, as Jamie Lee Curtis (transitioning from shy Laurie to free-spirited hitchhiker Elizabeth, who's quick to hop into the sack with Atkins' Nick Castle) is joined on screen by her mom, Janet Leigh, whose ill-fated *Psycho* shower set the template for Curtis' later onscreen terrorization.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and starring HAL HOLBROOK as Father Malone
Produced by DEBRA HILL Written by JOHN CARPENTER and DEBRA HILL Directed by JOHN CARPENTER
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Upholding the great traditions of spirit-centric literature and cinema, with their themes of guilt (embodied here by Holbrook's Father Malone) and reprisal, *The Fog*—like *Halloween*—is a fresh reading of time-honored material, and as such is a better modern ghost story than *Ghost Story* (also featuring Houseman), which opened the following year. With Carpenter contributing another nerve-jangling score and exhibiting a sure sense of pacing and atmosphere, *The Fog* is in every way a worthy successor to his slasher smash, while serving notice that here was a filmmaker who was not going to settle for retreading ground he'd successfully walked before.

—Michael Gingold

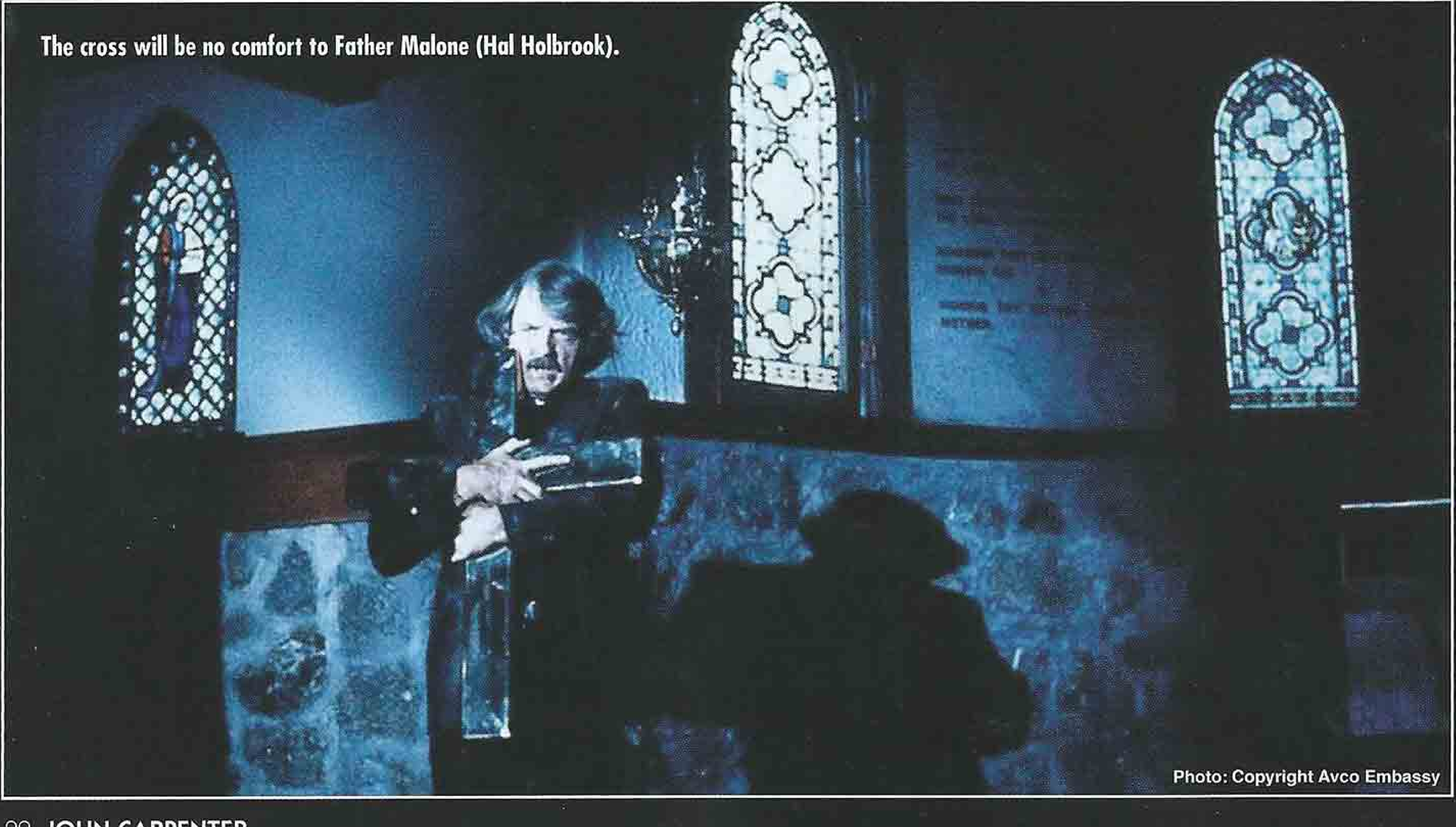
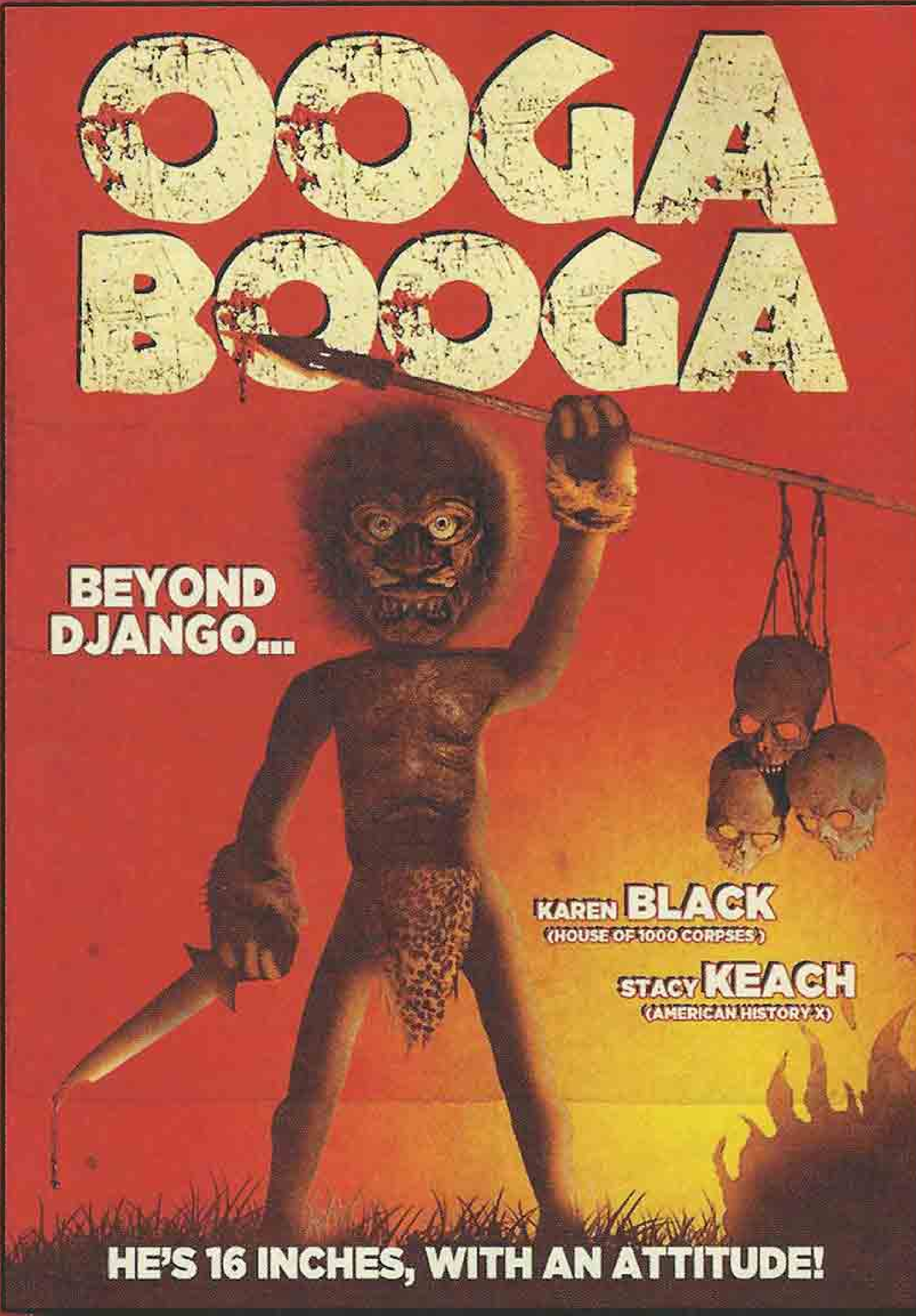

The cross will be no comfort to Father Malone (Hal Holbrook).

Photo: Copyright Avco Embassy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ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

Snake harmer

John Carpenter's two most enduring characters, who continue to be recognized even by mainstream moviegoers, are *Halloween*'s Michael Myers and a guy who likewise does his best work in the dark, and has one of the all-time coolest names you simply want to say aloud whenever you can: Snake Plissken, the ultimate antihero expertly portrayed by Kurt Russell in *Escape from New York*.

As this was the director's first foray into science fiction since his debut with *Dark Star*, and followed his success with the horrors of *Halloween* and *The Fog*, it's interesting to note that *Escape* is often remembered for its funnier moments, and also for transposing another genre—in this case, the Western and its constant scenario of an antihero searching for an important character in the untamed wilderness—into the sci-fi realm. Putting regular, working-class types whom viewers can identify with into fantastic settings is an interesting storytelling choice, and Carpenter always seems to find a way to humanize even the most clichéd archetypes, as depicted here—and that's a skill that has much less to do with having a budget than with being an artist. And it takes an artist to turn a genre on its head and still deliver the goods the way *Escape from New York* does.

Admittedly, this is an action film where not very much happens until the last 20 minutes (at least given a story with this much potential for explosive situations). But once you get over that expectation, what one finds here is not just an enjoyable comic-book movie (in the most complimentary sense of that description) but one that examines and shuffles around the elements that, when combined, come together to make an action film an action film.

Social commentary is hinted at via occasional references to hierarchies within the New York penal colony system: "Crazies" live in the sewer and come up to feed once a month, there are various gangs running around with names right out of Walter Hill's *The Warriors* and Ernest Borgnine's Cabbie (what the hell did he do to end up in this cesspool, one constantly wonders) often talks about how good or bad a neighborhood they are cruising through. Carpenter loves to toss out hints of a larger created world but rarely follows up on them, using these ideas as spice for the main story as opposed to following through on the various levels of subtext, the way a director like George A. Romero would. Adhering to his own weird rhythms, Carpenter keeps the story moving along without the use of distractions like flash-cutting, rapid gunfire exchanges or fiery explosions to fill the emptiness, when a disorienting pause or attitudinal dialogue exchange can be better utilized.

Although they only share a handful of scenes, Russell and Lee Van Cleef as Police Commissioner Bob Hauk (both perfectly cast) are mismatched partners whose antagonistic friction makes all their moments together count, and many of the film's highlights reside in their dialogue scenes in the first half and final reel. Character chemistry like this is essential to the action genre, and *Escape* proves that such interaction can be more important for generating thrills than any amount of mindlessly explosive violence. Strangely, for a film titled *Escape from New York*, many of the best scenes involve the anticipatory buildup to Snake being dropped into the city, as the energy level flags a bit once he actually arrives in the walled-off Manhattan and starts his attempt to rescue the President of the United States (somehow played, inexplicably, by Brit Donald Pleasance, who is nonetheless wonderful in the part).

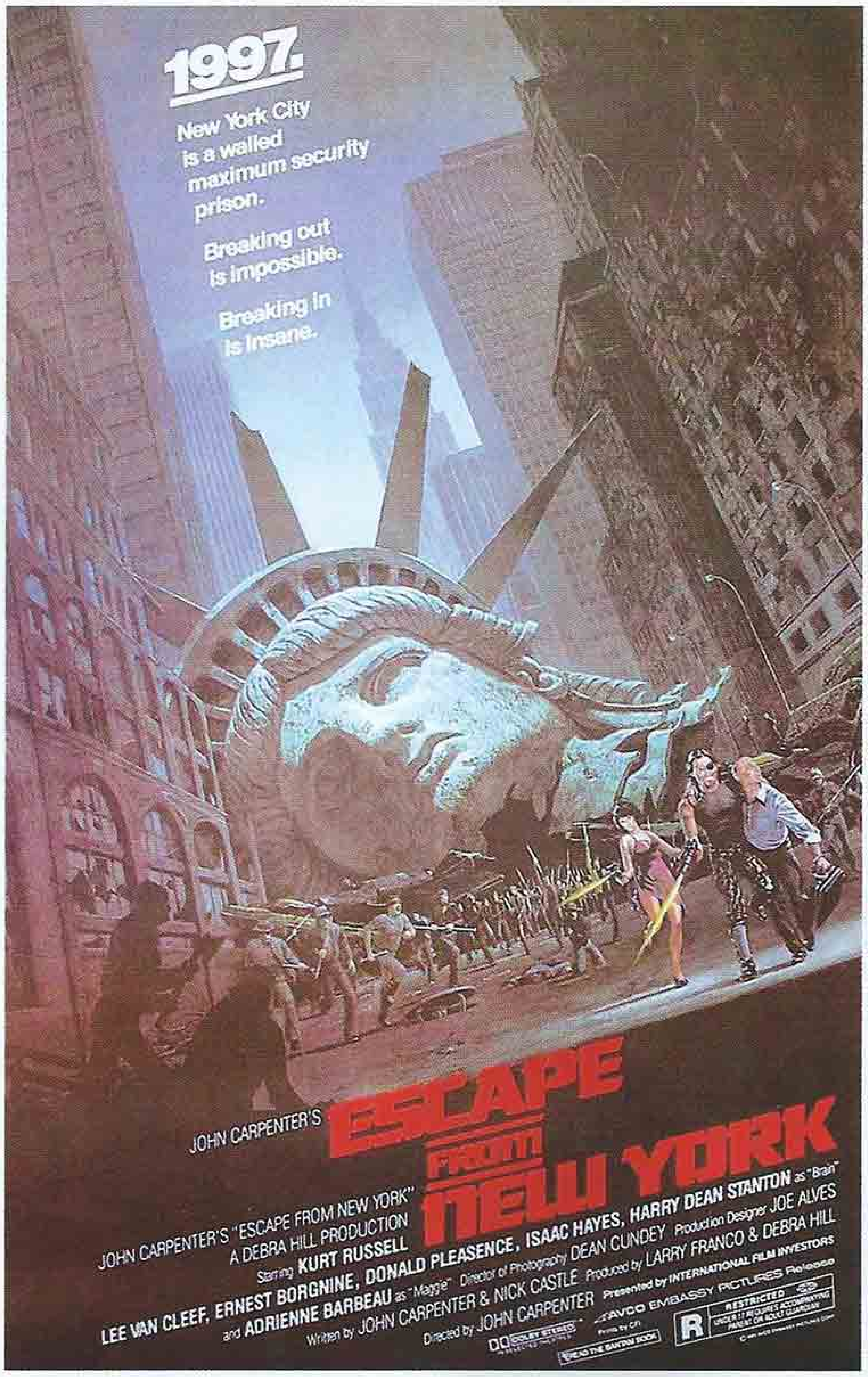
Time has been kind to many of the cheaper aspects of the production; background computer screens consisting of nothing more than blinky light patterns seem less shoddy and more nostalgic now. And make no mistake: *Escape* may have had Carpenter's largest budget up to that point, but it was barely enough for what he was trying to achieve, and most of the onscreen visual seams are expertly covered up by Dean Cundey's fine cinematography and Joe Alves' ingenious production design.

There's a visceral charge to be had from seeing helicopters actually swirling around the Statue of Liberty or an honest-to-goodness wrecked airplane strewn across the streets of a real city (St. Louis doubling for the Big Apple) that no amount of digital FX can quite replace. If you don't believe me, check out *Escape from L.A.*, and see what happens when you try to fold a burlap character like Snake Plissken into the silk purse of a CGI cartoon world; it's just not as effective. The director and collaborator Alan Howarth contribute a particularly memorable, sometimes eccentric synthesizer score (check out that Linn drum-machine programming whenever the theme for The Duke of New York pops up) with lots of atmospheric sound design that matches the film's cool-colored dark aesthetic as well as the occasional pitch-black comedic situations.

What keeps the film relevant is its insistence on confounding audience expectations; it's not mindless crap made just to keep the masses entertained, but follows the crazy metronome of its own demented heartbeat throughout. The awkward pauses in the forward momentum when Snake pulls a chair from the rubble of the airplane wreckage to sit and think for a spell, takes a brief cigarette break with Season Hubley in a Chock Full o' Nuts or casually walks past what appear to be the beginnings of a gang rape beneath a theater are moments that not only interrupt the flow, but also mold our perception of Snake's characterization of someone who is born simply to react—the very essence of the perfect cinematic character for audience identification—but only when absolutely necessary.

There's been talk of a remake for years now, but thankfully nothing has come of it yet, and *Escape from L.A.* is practically a remake anyway—proving that not even the original creators could quite get it right a second time. *Escape from New York* is nowhere near perfect, but it sure is a lot of fun, and stands on its own as a unique achievement from Carpenter and his collaborators.

—Scooter McCrae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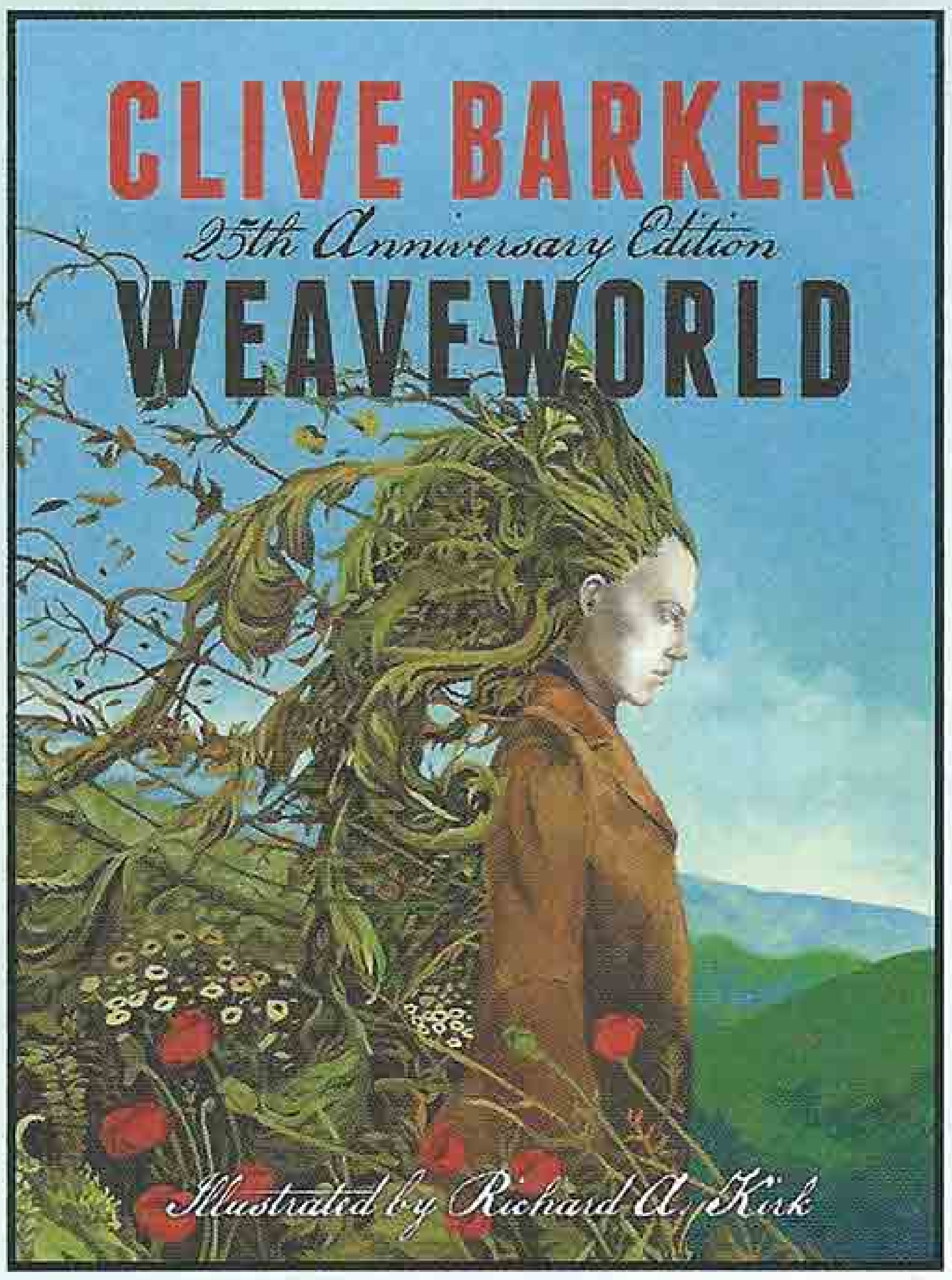
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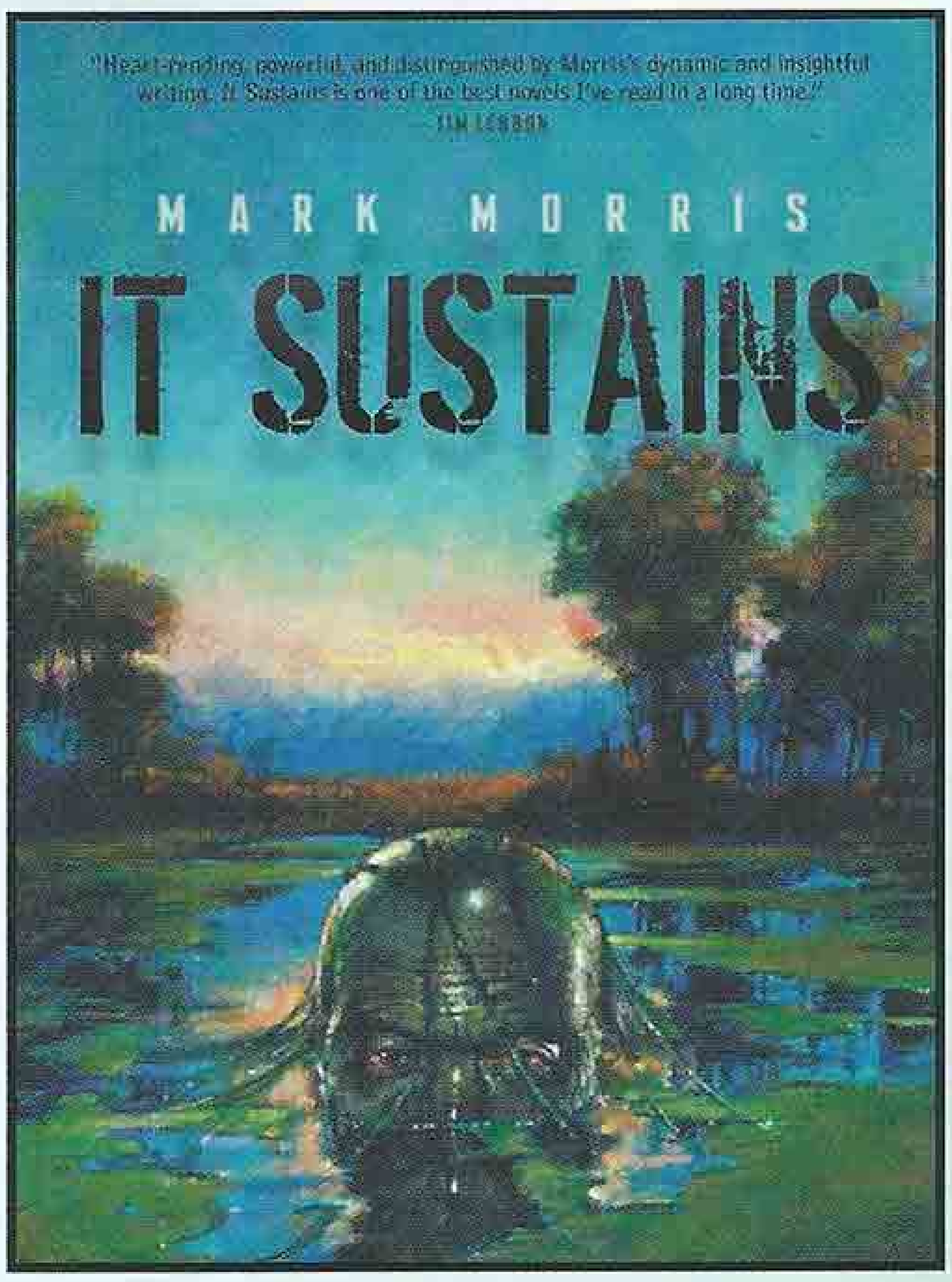
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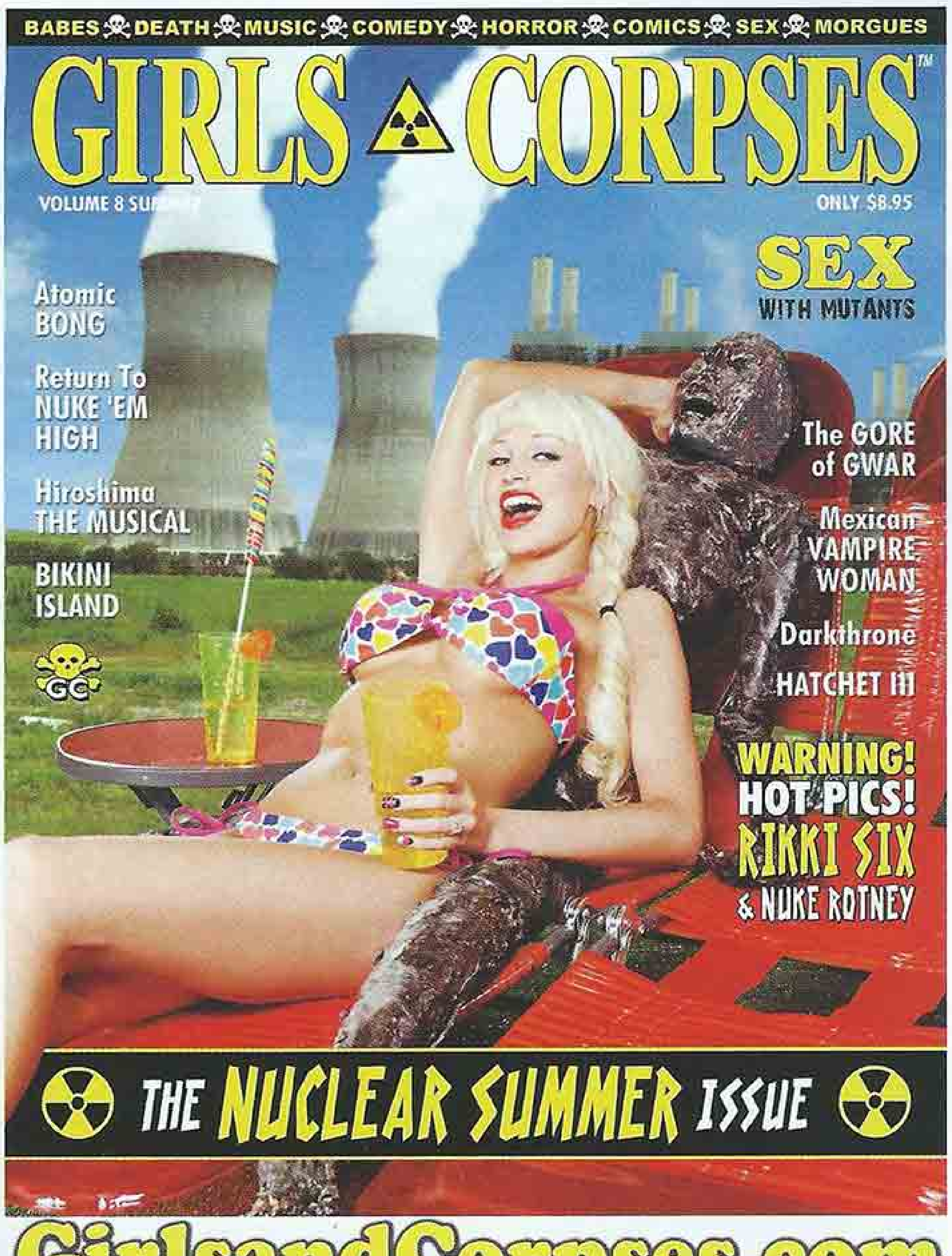
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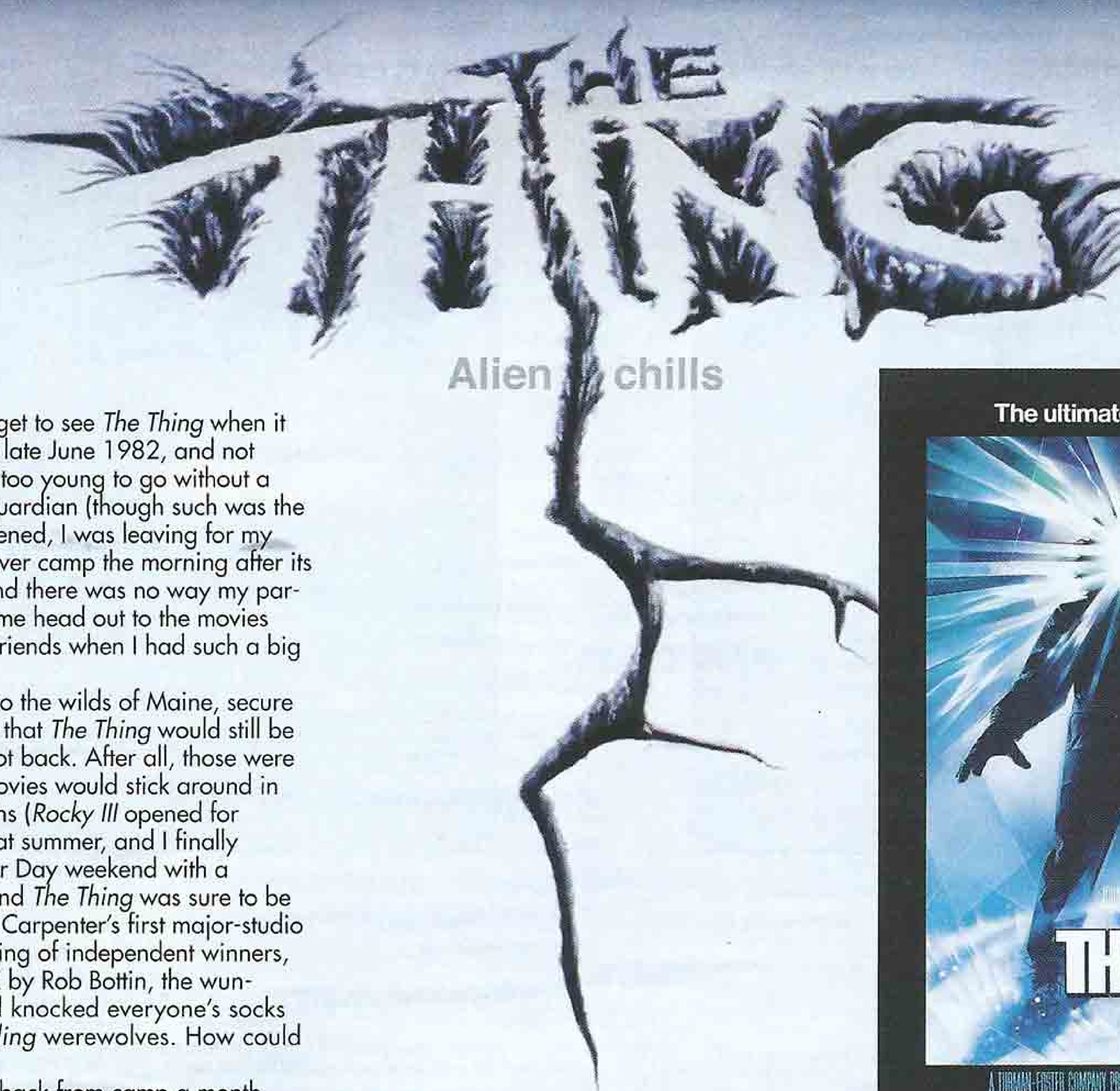
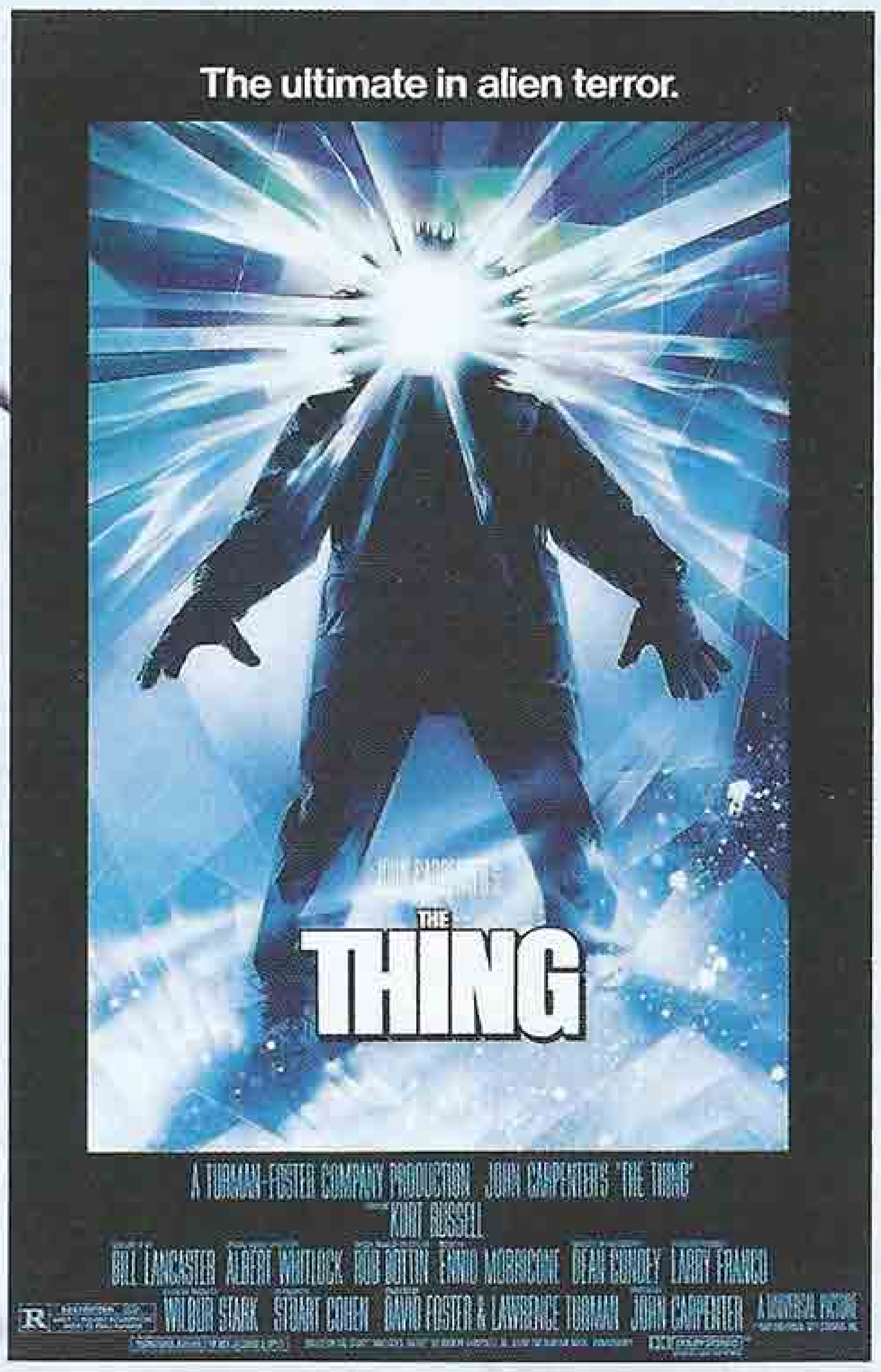


Alien chills


The ultimate in alien terror.
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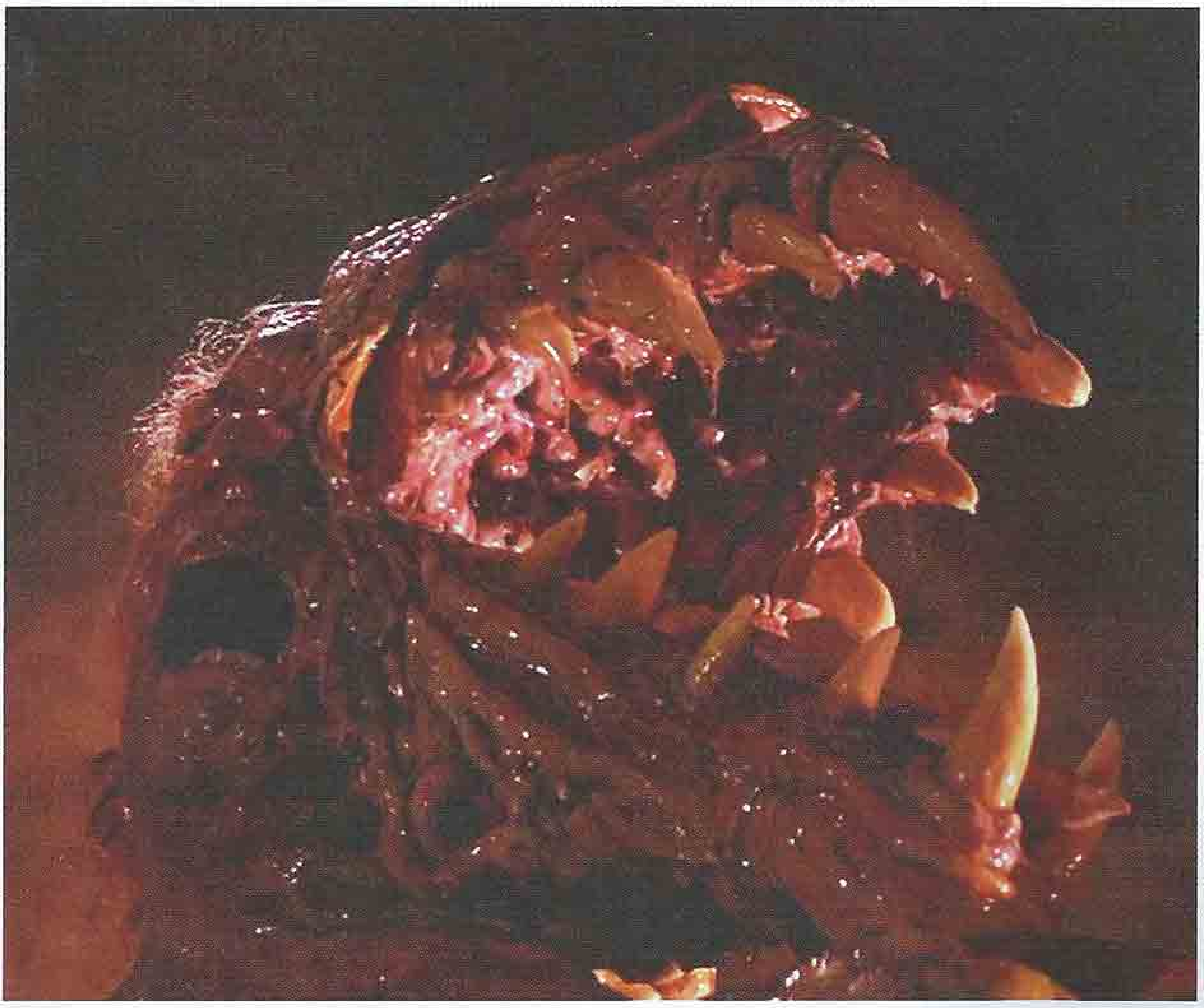
WILBUR STARK STUART COHEN DAVID FOSTER & LAWRENCE TURMAN JOHN CARPENTER
A UNIVERSAL PICTURE
R

I almost didn't get to see *The Thing* when it first opened in late June 1982, and not because I was too young to go without a parent or adult guardian (though such was the case). As it happened, I was leaving for my first trip to sleepover camp the morning after its opening night, and there was no way my parents were letting me head out to the movies with some older friends when I had such a big day tomorrow.

So off I went to the wilds of Maine, secure in the knowledge that *The Thing* would still be playing when I got back. After all, those were the days when movies would stick around in theaters for months (*Rocky III* opened for Memorial Day that summer, and I finally caught it on Labor Day weekend with a packed house), and *The Thing* was sure to be a hit. It was John Carpenter's first major-studio feature after a string of independent winners, and it boasted FX by Rob Bottin, the wunderkind who had knocked everyone's socks off with his *Howling* werewolves. How could it not succeed?

The day I got back from camp a month later, a newspaper story on the summer box office bore the bad news. *The Thing* was the flop of the season; it had debuted in eighth place that first weekend and never recovered, and was practically gone from theaters. (I wound up catching it on the sole tiny screen it was still playing in Manhattan.) Some people since have blamed *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, which arrived two weeks before and put a happy face on alien visitation for the year, though I'm not convinced that one was solely responsible. There was further competition that season from the sci-fi heavy hitters *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* and *Blade Runner*, not to mention another Steven Spielberg production, *Poltergeist*, whose PG-rated funhouse frights were more palatable to the mass audience than *The Thing*'s gritty hard-R paranoia and bodily disintegration.



***The Thing*'s practical creature creations still roar in the face of CGI.**

Then there were the reviews. It's common knowledge among fans that *The Thing* was dismissed by critics at the time, but those who weren't around back then might still be surprised by the level of vitriol that greeted the movie. *The New York Times*' Vincent Canby, who had sung *Escape from New York*'s praises just a year before, described *The Thing* as "the quintessential moron movie of the '80s… It qualifies only as instant junk." "Astonishingly, Carpenter blows it," wrote *Newsweek*'s David Ansen. "*The Thing* is so single-mindedly determined to keep you awake that it almost puts you to sleep," while Rex Reed groused, "We [critics] so often use words like 'obscene' and 'nauseating' to describe the violence and carnage pouring out of contemporary films that when a truly inhuman attack on public decency, such as John Carpenter's *The Thing*, comes along, there is the danger that no one will take us seriously." To this day, *Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide* asserts that the "non-stop parade of slimy, repulsive special effects turns this into a freak show and drowns most of the suspense."

If it seems like I'm harping on the negative here, it's only to emphasize what a remarkable amount of opposition *The Thing* had to overcome to achieve the classic status it earned and richly deserves—and which some may take for granted—today. That line from the Maltin-book blurb is telling, as it exemplifies how Carpenter's film was misread by so many

Rob Bottin's amazing monster FX can make you climb the walls.

of its detractors. Those slimy, repulsive—er, excuse me, terrifying and surreally brilliant illusions may be *The Thing*'s most attention-grabbing element, but they're far from the only horror/suspense trick in Carpenter's bag. Much of the film is concerned not with the grisly results of the alien assimilation that threatens the occupants of the Antarctic research station, but with the suspicion it breeds among the dwindling number of survivors. It's the simmering, distrustful tension Carpenter develops, not the explosions of latex and gore, that are "nonstop" in *The Thing*.

The ways in which the director builds to those moments also exemplify his mastery of misdirection as a crucial tool in creating horror. In his previous fright films, which had tended to isolate just one or a few characters in each scene, those tricks had been visual, guiding the audience to look to one part of the widescreen frame before he sprang a scary surprise on them from another. In *The Thing*, with its ensemble crowded into the base's small rooms, Carpenter manipulates dramatic emphasis to mislead the viewer as well. Take the famous moment when "Doc" Copper (Richard Dysart) puts the defibrillation paddles through the chest of Norris (Charles Hallahan), whose body becomes a mouth that devours Doc's arms before mutating into monstrous pieces. The FX here are stunning and shocking, to be sure, but what makes that first gag such a jolt is that Doc's attempted resuscitation of Norris is the B story of this scene. The real action, or so we think, is taking place across the room, where MacReady (Kurt Russell) holds a flamethrower on his distrustful comrades. That's where we're led to believe the violence will erupt, so when Doc's attempt at lifesaving is literally turned on its head, it's all the more startling.

Photos: Copyright Universal

The role of MacReady gave Kurt Russell his third chance to light up the screen for John Carpenter.

Another criticism of *The Thing* has centered on its characters, whom many critics at the time saw as one-dimensional meat puppets for the invader to manipulate. Bill Lancaster's script may not traffic in the banal arcs and "turning points" that render so many genre films predictable, but that doesn't mean his people are shallow. Rather, they come to be defined by how they react to the dire situation at hand, revealing themselves through bits of behavior that make each one human (until they're not, of course). The ending, in which MacReady and Childs (Keith David) sit amidst the burning ruins of the camp with no hope of survival, has come under fire for its perceived nihilism, when in fact the ability of the two to put aside their movie-long conflict, to sit back and "see what happens" rather than go *mano a mano* one last time, speaks further of the humanistic streak running under *The Thing*'s uncompromising surface.

It is the fact that *The Thing* values its people as much as its monsters, rather than descending into a freak show, that has allowed it to endure for over three decades. While *Halloween* remains my personal favorite Carpenter film, it is, while not exactly dated, demonstrably a movie of its era when viewed today. Not so with *The Thing*; more than 30 years later, it still plays as if it was made last week, neither its storytelling, craft nor characterizations having aged one bit (which renders the misbegotten 2011 "premake" even more superfluous). Repeated viewing can continue to offer new revelations, both in character interaction and telling or individualizing visual details; until I watched the movie on high-definition disc for the first time, I'd never noticed that Doc wears a nose ring. The basic fact may be that *The Thing* was just too far ahead of its time.

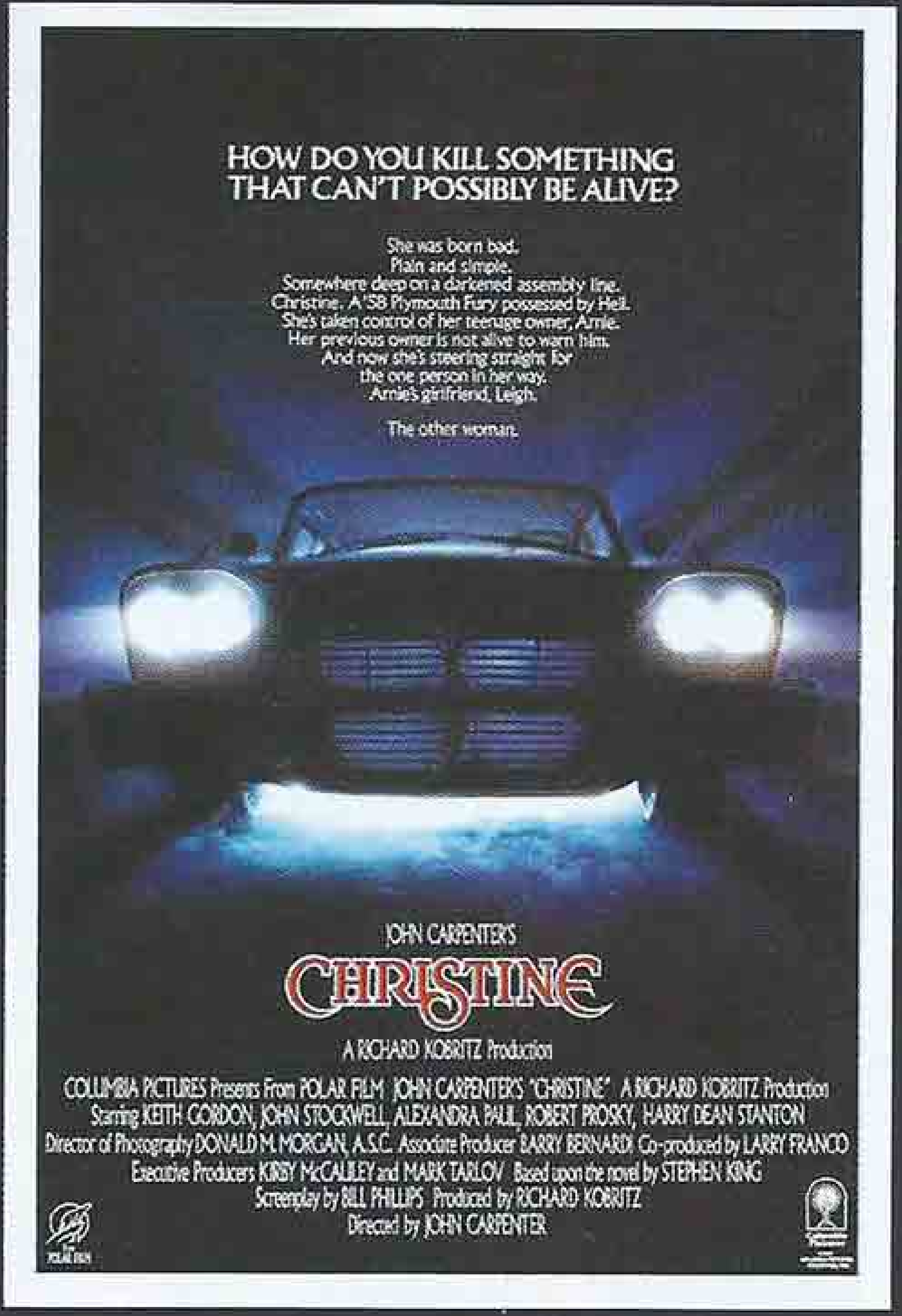
For further evidence, one need only look to a pair of movies that opened a little over a decade later and also attracted overwhelming attention for their violent content, when in fact their moments of bloodshed are spaced very sporadically within films mostly concerned with how its characters react to that violence and its threat. The difference was that in 1994-95, Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and David Fincher's *Se7en* (the latter of which sports an ending arguably even bleaker than *The Thing*'s) won critical raves and big grosses of the financial kind. Perhaps *The Thing* would have been a bigger hit if Carpenter and co. had simply waited a decade to make it; as it stands, they'll have to settle for having created a movie that will long be celebrated as a benchmark in the horror and special-FX fields.

—Michael Gingold

Like its flying saucer, true appreciation of *The Thing* took a while to surface.

CHRISTINE

She drives you crazy


HOW DO YOU KILL SOMETHING
THAT CAN'T POSSIBLY BE ALIVE?
She was born bad.
Plain and simple.
Somewhere deep on a darkened assembly line.
Christine. A '58 Plymouth Fury possessed by Hell.
She's taken control of her teenage owner, Arnie.
Her previous owner is not alive to warn him.
And now she's steering straight for
the one person in her way.
Arnie's girlfriend, Leigh.
The other woman.
JOHN CARPENTER'S
CHRISTINE
A RICHARD KOBRITZ Production
COLUMBIA PICTURES Presents From POLAR FILM JOHN CARPENTER'S "CHRISTINE" A RICHARD KOBRITZ Production
Starring KEITH GORDON, JOHN STOCKWELL, ALEXANDRA PAUL, ROBERT PROSKY, HARRY DEAN STANTON
Director of Photography DONALD M. MORGAN, A.S.C. Associate Producer BARRY BERNARDI Co-produced by LARRY FRANCO
Executive Producers KIRBY McCAULEY and MARK TARLOV Based upon the novel by STEPHEN KING
Screenplay by BILL PHILLIPS Produced by RICHARD KOBRITZ
Directed by JOHN CARPENTER

Christine is generally regarded as a lesser John Carpenter film, so would it shock fans to learn that it was his comeback from the critical and financial disappointment of *The Thing*? Time has been kind to that masterpiece, but how does this adaptation of Stephen King's subtext-heavy novel of a teen and his killer car hold up?

Christine chronologically and thematically bridges Carpenter's bleak monster epic with the quiet vulnerability of *Starman*, but its lack of Kurt Russell or The Shape puts it in the backseat of most-loved by fans. Which is unfair in retrospect, since we can now take *Christine*'s premise for granted. A potentially ridiculous movie about a sentient car manages to be exciting, touching and chilling. Not to mention that it contains amazing suspense set-pieces and the eponymous vehicle, which Carpenter, through sheer filmmaking skill, gives a distinct personality.

In another clear example of the director's gift for casting, *Christine*'s human protagonists—awkward geek Arnie Cunningham (Keith Gordon) and handsome quarterback Dennis Guilder (John Stockwell)—embody the most on-the-nose stereotypes a high-school movie could employ, yet through Gordon's humor and Stockwell's warmth, they are not only credible best friends but earn our sympathy from the first scene. Dennis is a jock, but a *nice* jock whose protective attitude toward Arnie earns him a kind of nobility. Arnie's a nerd, but even before he gets picked on by Buddy Repperton (William Ostrander, pitch-perfect as the fiercely cocky bully) or butts heads with his cold and controlling mother (Christine Belford, also fierce, also perfect), the audience feels for him. We see his wit and heart, and determine that Arnie's a good kid who just hasn't yet come into his own yet.

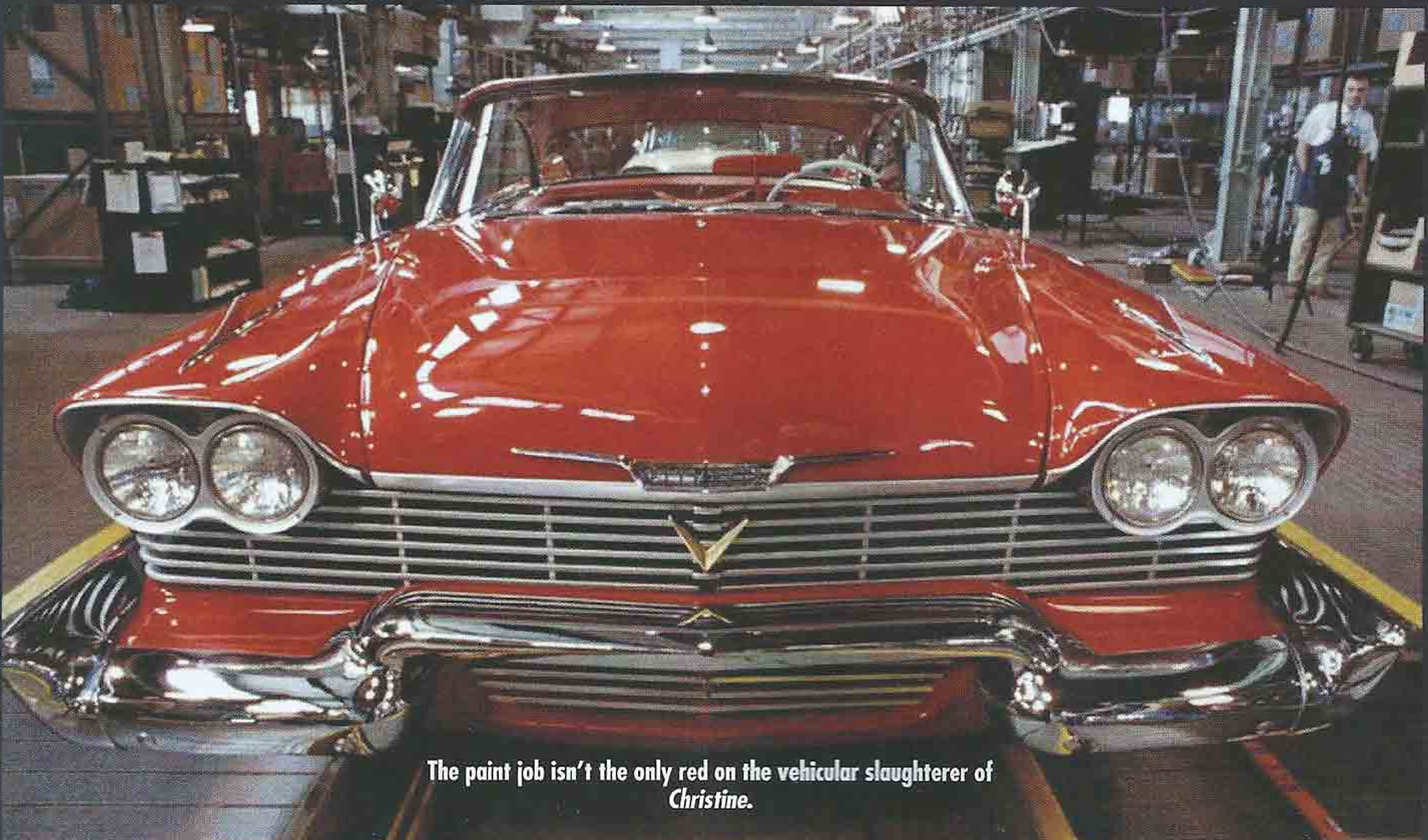
The deck is stacked with expectations by the time Arnie spots a junked 1958 Plymouth Fury and falls in love with it. The old coot who sells Arnie the car (veteran character actor Roberts Blossom, the fictionalized Ed Gein from *Deranged*) calls it Christine, and soon Arnie restores her to suspiciously cherry condition and grows confident enough to date Leigh (Alexandra Paul), the pretty new girl at school.

Every high-school horror movie is loaded with metaphors, but *Christine* is also drenched in tragic humanity. Arnie's first love is that car, like a gearhead who lives for his vehicle, but Arnie deeply personifies any close friend you saw change before your eyes via a toxic relationship—in this case, his love for the homicidal Fury. That the car is both conscious and deadly has already been established in the sepia-toned opening scene, in which Carpenter shows the beautiful red Plymouth scoring her first kill right off the assembly line.

What *Christine* demonstrates best is the musicality of Carpenter's visual orchestration. Suspense and shock in film are inherently musical, dependent on tempo and composition (Hitchcock once said he liked to "play the audience like a violin"). A musician like Carpenter knows this in his bones, and the best sequences in *Christine* heighten tension through sound and timing: the rumble of Christine's idling engine, the beat she takes before roaring into gear and the synth sting that accompanies the sudden shock of her headlights. Consider the scene in which Christine chases one of Buddy's stooges, Moochie (Malcolm Danare). Moochie walks through a parking garage late at night and slows when he hears the warm humming of Thurston Harris' "Little Bitty Pretty One," eerily muffled, growing insistently louder as Moochie approaches the car. Carpenter's score doesn't even come in until Christine lunges forward, tires squealing.

When Moochie barely escapes, Carpenter pulls another reveal with his trademark use of anamorphic lenses; as Moochie pants, watching for Christine, her headlights sneak silently into the background in soft focus. Carpenter uses those headlights as persistently as Michael's white mask emerging from blackness in *Halloween*. Like the best action directors, he establishes proximity and propels us forward beat by beat, so that Christine's attack on Buddy in a gas station clicks from shot to shot in the same clockwork fashion as the climax of Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

More than building tension, this is also how Carpenter develops Christine as a character. The camera focuses on her "actions" to the point where the audience feels they can see Christine thinking; she plots, strategizes, even reacts. She becomes so convincing that the revelation that Arnie is driving her in the climactic scenes is a surprise. You wonder if he was always behind the wheel; then, when Christine revs herself up and peels out without Arnie, the



The paint job isn't the only red on the vehicular slaughterer of *Christine*.

Auto asphyxiation threatens Leigh (Alexandra Paul).

Photos: Copyright Columbia

affirmation of her sentience is somehow invigorating. You may even find yourself rooting for her in the end, an achievement in and of itself. After all, Christine is just a car; that she emerges not only as a character, but our *favorite* character, is a testament to Carpenter's skill.

That's all the more apparent considering he's not working with the most elegant screenplay. Writer Bill Phillips kicks off entire plot arcs with on-the-nose exposition, such as Buddy noticing Arnie's car at a football game and Moochie stating, "I know where he keeps it." The next time we see those characters, they're sneaking into Darnell's garage to destroy Christine; it's one beat shy of beginning a scene with "Let's go!" and then cutting to where they went. Moments like that, and the underwhelming dialogue that drags down the movie's third act, only really stand out in contrast to the pitch-perfect filmmaking surrounding them.

Still, *Christine* speaks volumes for Carpenter's ability to elevate material. If there's any single term that has been misappropriated most in modern cinema, it's "auteur." The first filmmakers to be described as such were directors like Alfred Hitchcock and Carpenter's hero Howard Hawks. Their authorship of any movie was established purely through their choices as director. *Christine* wasn't a personal project for Carpenter, but his approach defines the film. For example, Harry Dean Stanton appears in the standard suspicious-police-officer role, but plays the character as the voice of reason, bringing disarming warmth and authority to simplistic formula. Strategically casting an effortlessly fascinating actor like Stanton perfectly illustrates how Carpenter can transform a script without rewriting it.

Likewise, choosing Alexandra Paul for the role of Leigh. Gorgeous Kelly Preston shows up as a cheerleader jilted by Dennis, and easily fits a casting director's idea of leading lady, but Paul's natural intelligence and sensitivity make Leigh's relationship with Arnie believable and poignant. Those elements may be suggested by the page, but a one-dimensional version of *Christine* could easily have existed with the same script.

The general plot of King's novel is reflected in that screenplay, but his most horrific passages are not. Some may have been cut for cost (one of the book's setpieces involves Christine basically destroying a house to reach someone on the second story), but King has Arnie regularly seeing ghosts, and it's heavily suggested that the car's former owner is controlling it. The movie makes the more powerful choice that Christine is naturally evil, without explanation. The adaptation streamlines the story, as any King film has to, but solves dramatic problems cleverly (Arnie's role in the finale, for example).

On the other hand, the soundtrack *is* inspired by the book, as King begins every chapter by citing songs that would have played over Christine's radio. Carpenter in turn makes the monotonous blitheness of '50s bubblegum pop sound sinister, using golden oldies as if they were the *Jaws* theme. This could have turned cute in John Landis/"Blue Moon" mode (Little Richard's "Keep A Knockin' " provides a laugh), but when Christine blares "We Belong Together" as Leigh chokes in the passenger seat, it's terrifying. Christine's regenerative powers are gloriously revealed to the accompaniment of The Viscounts' darkly sexy surf-suite "Harlem Nocturne," and Carpenter even turns George Thorogood's then not-yet-overused "Bad to the Bone" into a bad-ass anthem.

Those source cues would overshadow the original music (and anyone familiar with licensing costs will practically weep when the throwaway incidental music is the Rolling Stones' "Beast of Burden"), except the score is among Carpenter's best. Cold sadness saturates its pulsing heartbeat, giving even the coolest kill (Christine, engulfed in flames, running down Buddy on a dark road) a sense of stomach-dropping dread rather than total exhilaration.

Carpenter is a smart and perceptive filmmaker, and *Christine* shows him nimbly dealing with heavy emotions, but he's also preternaturally opposed to pretension. Hence *Christine* works as both a drama and a cool car-crash flick with a roaring engine for a heart. By stripping the story of elements that would have been difficult to physically represent, Carpenter and co. turn King's unlikely story into an equally unlikely, equally unsettling thriller. The director delivers by interpreting the material without reinterpreting it, providing style and skill while the story and performances carry the subtext. *Christine* is arguably not even his best or most iconic film, but cannily illustrates why Carpenter's work in horror is so effective.

Christine begins taking people out right off the assembly line.

The used car George LeBay (Roberts Blossom, right) sells Arnie (Keith Gordon) has a more troublesome history than usual.

KEITH GORDON: DRIVING CHRISTINE

Starring for Carpenter at the wheel of a killer car was a learning experience for the actor and aspiring director.

After his uncommonly strong directorial debut with 1988's *The Chocolate War*, Keith Gordon emerged as an indelible creator of observant, occasionally challenging movies, among them the WWII ensemble drama *A Midnight Clear* and arguably the only successful film adaptation of a Kurt Vonnegut novel, *Mother Night*. Horror fans may recognize his name from helming several episodes of *Dexter*, but they certainly know his face from *Jaws 2*, *Dressed to Kill* and the lead role of Arnie Cunningham in *Christine*. As a young actor with aspirations to direct, Gordon's experiences on John Carpenter's Stephen King adaptation contained some of the most important lessons in a burgeoning filmmaker's education.

Gordon, Alexandra Paul and John Stockwell always had to keep in mind who the real star was.

"There were a few people who had a key influence on me as a director, and John was certainly one of them," Gordon reflects. "His demeanor and way of running a set were really important for me to see. *Christine* wasn't an easy movie; it was low-budget, with a lot of physical effects. It wasn't like John had a lot of time, but he never seemed stressed out and was always very playful, and kept things light. Practical jokes were an ongoing thing; people laughed a lot! Many movies have an unspoken class divide, where you have the creative types and actors eating lunch over here, and the crew eating lunch over there. On *Christine*, everybody hung out together; there was no separation. I learned a lot about filmmaking, but nothing quite as valuable as just thinking, 'Wow, you can make a movie set fun; even if it's hard work and long hours, you can make people glad to be there.' "

Gordon remembers that laid-back atmosphere becoming focused when Carpenter and crew staged complicated stunts. "Even when things got tough, he kept it all pretty calm. People follow a director's lead. When the car wouldn't start, he'd laugh it off, shrug and wouldn't let it be a big thing. And that happened—the car was very touchy!"

Gordon often found himself working directly with those eponymous vehicles. "It's probably harder for actors today to act with CGI and nothing in front of them. I always had a real car to look at! I remember driving it, thinking, 'This thing's a boat—it's humongous!' But I loved it." Not that the automobiles were without their quirks, having been rebuilt from near scrap. "They had this goofy gearshift system where you had to push a button on the dash to put them into gear, and after 20 years that didn't work so well. You'd get in the car, start it off with a really impressive *vroom* and push the button and just sit there, not moving. John would never throw up his hands and say, 'Oh my God, what a disaster!' He'd just say, 'All right, let's get it fixed and do it again.' "

Gordon also recalls exciting moments on set when he wasn't required to work. "When [stunt coordinator] Terry Leonard drove that car into the gas station wall at 35 miles per hour, I was like, 'How does your body not say *take your foot off the gas and put it on the brake, you idiot?*' I've always had respect for stuntpeople, but seeing them do that kind of stuff live was amazing."

Recalling such moments, it's no wonder Gordon chose to hang around even on his days off. "The car on fire—I stayed up all night watching them shoot that. Sometimes in movies, things look dopey when they're being shot and you're amazed later: 'Wow, it looks really good cut together!' But John's stuff looked amazing to the naked eye."

Christine gave Gordon his first big-screen lead, and a more challenging, multidimensional role than most people that age could hope for. "What's interesting is that it's the blossoming of a character, and then him dying. Arnie gets to a point where sure, he's cool, but he doesn't have any humanity left. He goes from picked-on nerd to finding himself to losing himself."

"The way [Carpenter] directed me would have to have been different from the way he directed Donald Pleasence."

Gordon portrays the transformation deftly, though when it came to Carpenter's direction, he points out, "John doesn't tend to go into the really heavy psychological stuff, but if I wanted to go there as an actor, he would. He let the actors guide him on what would help them. With rehearsals and even first takes, it felt like he'd see what we had, and then adjust it. It certainly felt like a collaboration. Was he like that with Roddy Piper on *They Live*? I'm not sure. When I started as a filmmaker, I'd end up directing actors the way I'd want to be directed, and I had to then say, 'Oh, that works for me, but not necessarily for somebody else.' John already knew that. The way he directed me would have to have been different from the way he directed Donald Pleasence."

You can see paranormal by the dashboard light as Christine's possession takes hold.

Gordon goes on to express gratitude toward Carpenter's inclusive attitude: "He was really kind to me; he knew I wanted to be a director, and would humor my endless questions about what he was doing and why. He'd try to crack me up during takes; he'd make faces offscreen sometimes. That sounds like the most awful thing to do, but young actors tend to take everything seriously, and John just wouldn't let you get that serious unless you needed to. Then suddenly, he would change his whole approach and set the mood and atmosphere, just to make sure I could get there."

Though their movies are quite different, Carpenter also influenced Gordon's cinematic style. "I was lucky enough to work with opposite ends of the spectrum," Gordon notes. "[*Dressed*'s Brian] De Palma was baroque, and John was economical. It wasn't that he wouldn't do interesting things with the camera, it's that they were very composed shots. Both approaches are valid, but it was wonderful to work with an auteur who wasn't afraid to just put the camera down and find a good frame. Young directors think, 'I have to make every scene look impressive!' John would seem to say, 'If you make every scene impressive, then your big moment won't be.' So when he finally does move the camera in when I say, 'Show me,' if he had done that same shot 25 times previously, it wouldn't have been special. I think he got that restraint from John Ford and Howard Hawks, and he certainly reinforced it in me.

"I imagine John was a confident filmmaker from the beginning," he continues. "I don't think he'd ever be nervous about whether he could pull something off. He was hurt by the bad reviews for *The Thing*, which of course were ridiculous; it's arguably his best film. At the time, he'd been raked over the coals and it hurt his feelings, but it clearly hadn't dashed him. There was a certain 'Screw them all, I'm going to keep doing what I want to do' attitude. That's a key to his strength: He believes in his own talent. I know he wants people to like his stuff, but I don't believe that's where he gets his sense of self. A lot of artists—even great ones—need that public approbation and approval. I don't think that's ever what gets John up in the morning."

Gordon similarly has nothing but praise for his co-stars (especially dedicated activist Alexandra Paul) and the crew, and believes Carpenter feels the same, though he's careful not to speak for the director. "It felt like he enjoyed making *Christine*. I don't know if it was as personal to him as his other films, but if the movie works at all, it's because John made it his own. The humor he brought to it, especially; I recall him saying, 'Remember, it's about a killer car. If we take it *too* seriously, everyone's going to laugh at us.' "

Arnie Cunningham (Keith Gordon) won't need insurance for Christine to get fixed, but those who trashed her are gonna need life insurance.

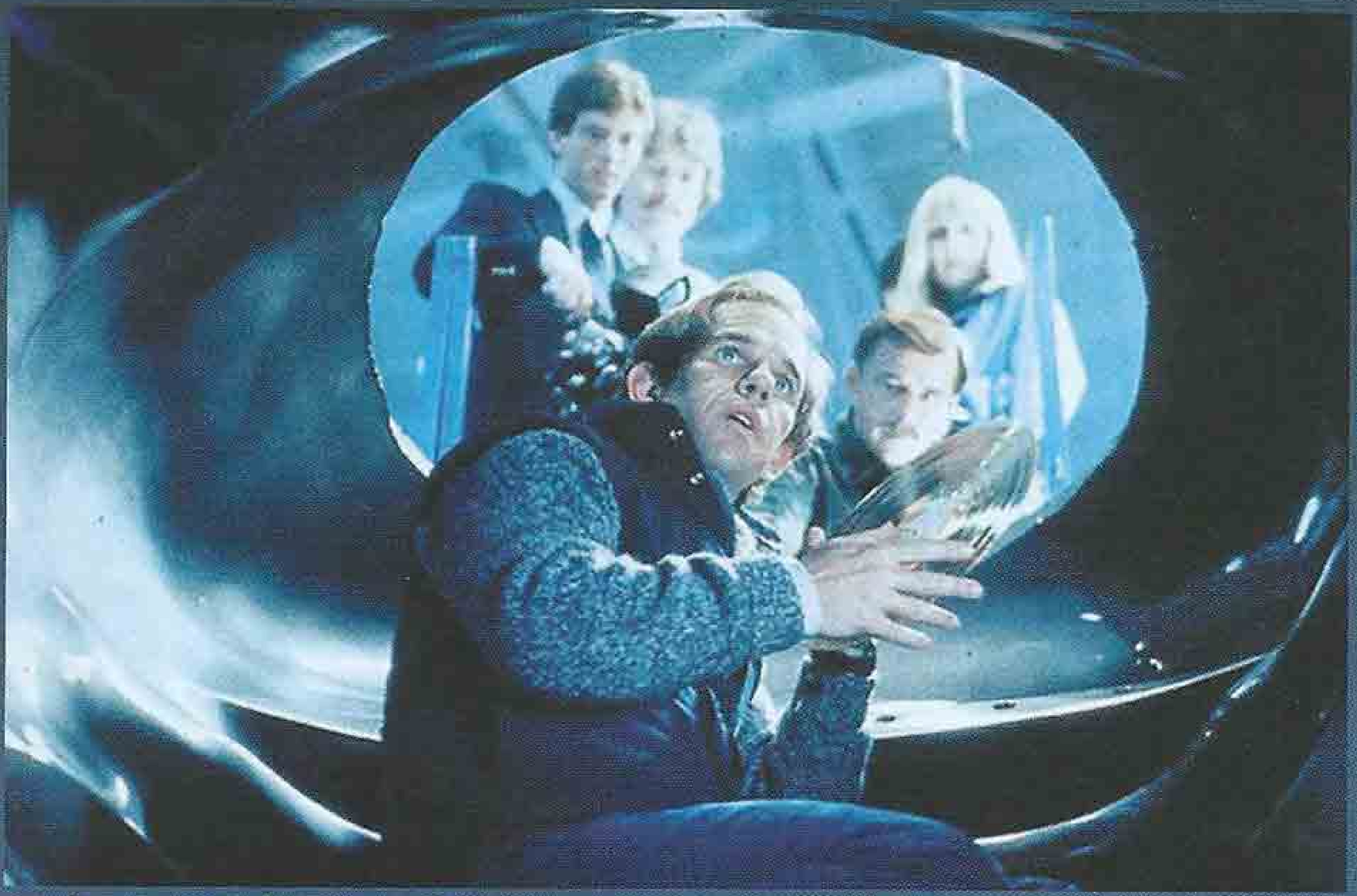
Photos: Copyright Columbia

Gordon is matter-of-fact regarding the industry's role in pigeonholing filmmakers, including Carpenter. "John had such incredible success with *Halloween* and followed it with *The Fog*, so people said, 'Oh, that's what he does—he's a horror guy.' So it doesn't matter that a number of his movies aren't in the genre. But even his horror movies are quite different from each other. The one thing he always has is a certain intensity; he creates powerful images and compositions, he writes that great music, has a great sense of rhythm in his editing. It's filmmaking basics, but he brings them to bear on horror films in a way that happens to be tremendously effective. You can go back to his movies after you've already seen them, and they still get your heart racing."

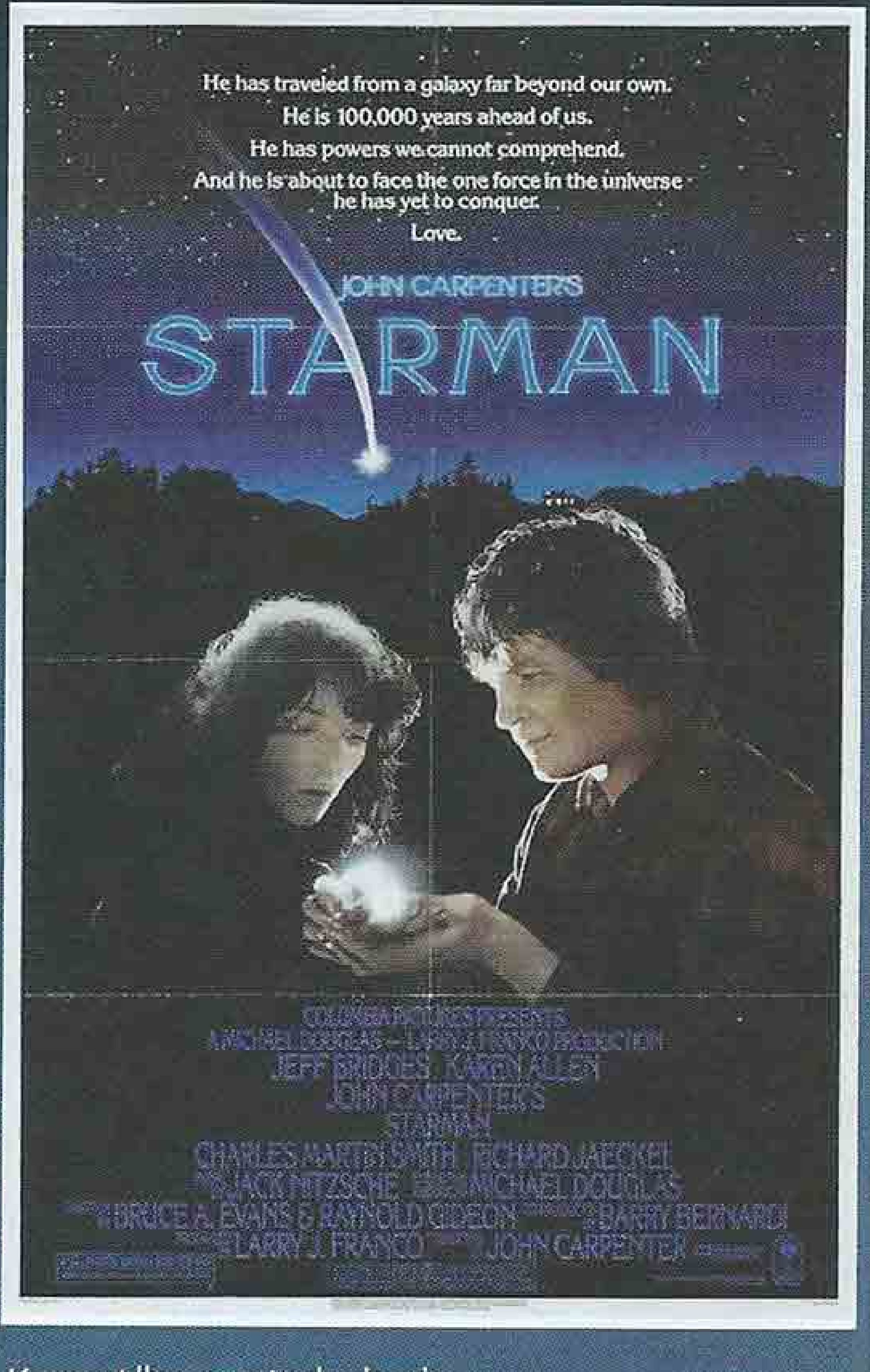
Gordon says John Carpenter waited to show his stuff till Christine showed hers.

STARMAN

Some thing romantic



Only scientist Mark Shermin (Charles Martin Smith) recognizes that the extraterrestrial visitor has come in peace.


He has traveled from a galaxy far beyond our own.
He is 100,000 years ahead of us.
He has powers we cannot comprehend.
And he is about to face the one force in the universe he has yet to conquer.
Love.
JOHN CARPENTER'S
STARMAN
COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENTS
A MICHAEL DOUGLAS — LARRY J. FRANCO PRODUCTION
JEFF BRIDGES KAREN ALLEN
JOHN CARPENTER'S
STARMAN
CHARLES MARTIN SMITH RICHARD JAECKEL
JACK NITZSCHE MICHAEL DOUGLAS
BRUCE A. EVANS & RAYNOLD GIDEON BARRY BERNARDI
LARRY J. FRANCO JOHN CARPENTER

In spring 1981, Columbia Pictures found itself considering two alien-centric scripts, in the end holding onto one titled *Starman* while passing on the other, a family-friendly tale called *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, which wound up at Universal. The latter studio, which was heading into production at the same time on John Carpenter's alien-invasion chiller *The Thing*, put *E.T.* into the pipeline immediately, resulting in the unique problem (one that Columbia had consciously avoided) of one company having two similarly themed pictures in theaters simultaneously. When the films went head to head in summer 1982, it was *The Thing* that suffered critical and turnstile blows, and while *E.T.* director Steven Spielberg was lauded by the masses, Carpenter was sent packing, released from his multipicture deal with the house that Laemmle built.

The response to *The Thing* hurt the young director, who thought he had taken care with the cornerstone sci-fi story he so treasured. Carpenter was no stranger to science fiction, and despite staking his territory in genre cinema with *Halloween* and *The Fog*, aliens and outer space have always commanded his heart. As a child, Super-8 camera in hand, the budding filmmaker made short after short, most little more than a single scene, all takes on the sci-fi classics he adored. *Terror from Space*, *Sorcerer from Outer Space* and *Gorgon the Space Monster* are just a few of the "inspired by" titles of his early celluloid exploits.

Such was Carpenter's reverence for science fiction classics that he initially hesitated when offered the remake of *The Thing from Another World*. He knew what the original story by John W. Campbell Jr. meant to fans the world over, and more so, knew what the 1951 Howard Hawks-produced film meant to him. Once he focused on a return to the source material and the idea that the creature could look like anyone and anything, Carpenter boldly set out on an odyssey of bizarre creatures, craft-defining FX and claustrophobic intensity that is now impossible not to consider a benchmark in genre cinema. "If [they] aren't here to kill us, what good are they?" he laughed of alien visitors in his interview for this magazine (see page 10). Then came *Starman*…

After the critical backlash and studio retaliation in the wake of *The Thing*, Carpenter decided to head in a new direction. He signed with Columbia, which, teaming with producer Michael Douglas, promptly presented him with the *Starman* screenplay, originally written by Bruce A. Evans and Raynold Gideon, that had gone through years of development and rewrites. The story couldn't have been a greater departure from *The Thing*, telling of an alien who arrives peacefully on Earth to evaluate its people, and falls in love as he races against death to his mission deadline. Not knowing where to turn next, but sure he had much to prove, Carpenter signed on, and the project moved into production with Jeff Bridges and Karen Allen cast in the leads.

The story begins with the alien's craft crash-landing in a remote wooded area of northern Wisconsin, the passenger making its way into the nearest house, belonging to recently widowed Jenny Hayden (Allen). As she sleeps, the being, at this point merely a glowing orb, sifts through a photo album to find an appropriate form, coming across strands of hair clipped from Jenny's deceased husband Scott and picking up on the DNA within. Jenny wakes and comes across an infant writhing on the floor, followed in rapid succession by fast evolution through all the stages of human development, ending up an exact adult clone of her beloved. "Scott" asks her to take him to a meeting place in Arizona, where his mission will end, and the pair set out on a cross-country trek—discovering each other, evading the authorities and making a few miracles happen along the way.

The shoot spanned the United States, from Nashville, Tennessee to Cedar Rapids, Iowa on through to the desert outside Winslow, Arizona, where the film's climax was staged. The $24-million budget allowed for this expansive production, possibly the most far-reaching in Carpenter's canon, but the stretch wasn't only

Traveling across the universe, and then across the country, the Starman (Jeff Bridges) reaches out to Jenny (Karen Allen).

The Starman doesn't understand yet that the lights are supposed to be outside the car.

geographic. Above all else, *Starman* is a love story—virgin territory for the director at the time, and subject matter he has yet to re-approach. Romantic story be damned, though; Carpenter brought along his dastardly bag of tricks, filling *Starman* with a series of unforgettable, challenging moments and setting his story afloat on the dark underlying threat that Bridges' friendly visitor essentially spends the entire film slowly dying.

In *Starman,* John Carpenter introduced an alien that eats things other than humans.

Photos: Copyright Columbia

Three top FX talents raised the visitor from baby to adult in a matter of minutes.

Setting the picture up is the incredible living-room transformation in which the alien transitions from glowing orb to fully fleshed-out adult human. For this setpiece, Carpenter assembled an A-list team of industry vets to pull off what has become one of *Starman's* signature moments. In July 1984, FANGORIA caught wind that Dick Smith was doing some work on the picture, and got the legend on the phone. "Stan Winston, Rick Baker and I are collaborating on it," Smith reported. "Each of us will do a separate element contained in one scene." Initially choreographed by Smith on his own, it was broken down into three stages, with each FX artist taking control of one. Baker handled the first illusion (the infant), Winston created the second (infant turns into boy), and Smith tackled the third (boy turns into man).

"Our total screen time will be less than a minute, but it is certainly a unique sequence," Smith related. "The prospect of the three of us working on the same film together definitely adds to the excitement."

In addition to that evolution, there are other memorable moments sprinkled throughout the picture, including the opening UFO crash, the Starman healing Jenny when she is mortally injured and the emotionally stirring resurrection of a deer tied to the hood of a hunter's car in a restaurant parking lot. Bridges plays the alien as a fish out of water, but manages to mine pure innocence and sincerity from a character forced to speak in stunted sentence fragments. While the Starman journeys against his own lethal biological clock, he makes time to give life and restore health to every damaged living thing that crosses his path. It is a remarkably kind portrait of the potential in humanity, and a marked 180-degree turn from the distrust and inner struggle that permeates every character in *The Thing*.

As *Starman* falls somewhere between romance and science fiction, the film is Carpenter's greatest triumph in presenting a genuine relationship between a man and a woman. His pictures are often populated with men doing manly things alongside women of similar grit, but here he gives us the fragile, fawnlike Jenny, damaged by the loss of her greatest love, forced to confront the overwhelming emotion encountered when he "reappears" in her life. Bridges' visitor earns her heart through acts of kindness, taking her from complete distrust and confusion to earnest affection by the adventure's end. It doesn't matter that he's only "Scott" in flesh; he is just as, if not more, amazing than her lost beau, and her ability to give herself to the being that only days prior had so terrified her is proof positive that Carpenter can hand audiences the sublime as deftly as the nasty.

Starman did decent business at the box office, enough to satisfy Columbia—but more importantly, it offered Carpenter a stage on which to prove he was about more than beasties and bogeymen; under his guidance, Bridges received his first Best Actor Academy Award nomination. *Starman* is a brilliant, hopeful outing for an icon who has made a career out of trying to satisfy the tireless auteur within himself, all while unable to ignore his innate ability to entertain the masses. Perhaps the Starman and his creator aren't so distinct after all.

—Justin Beahm

SYNTHESIZING SCARES

Composer Alan Howarth helped John Carpenter create the sounds that made the whole world scream.

By SCOOTER McCRAE

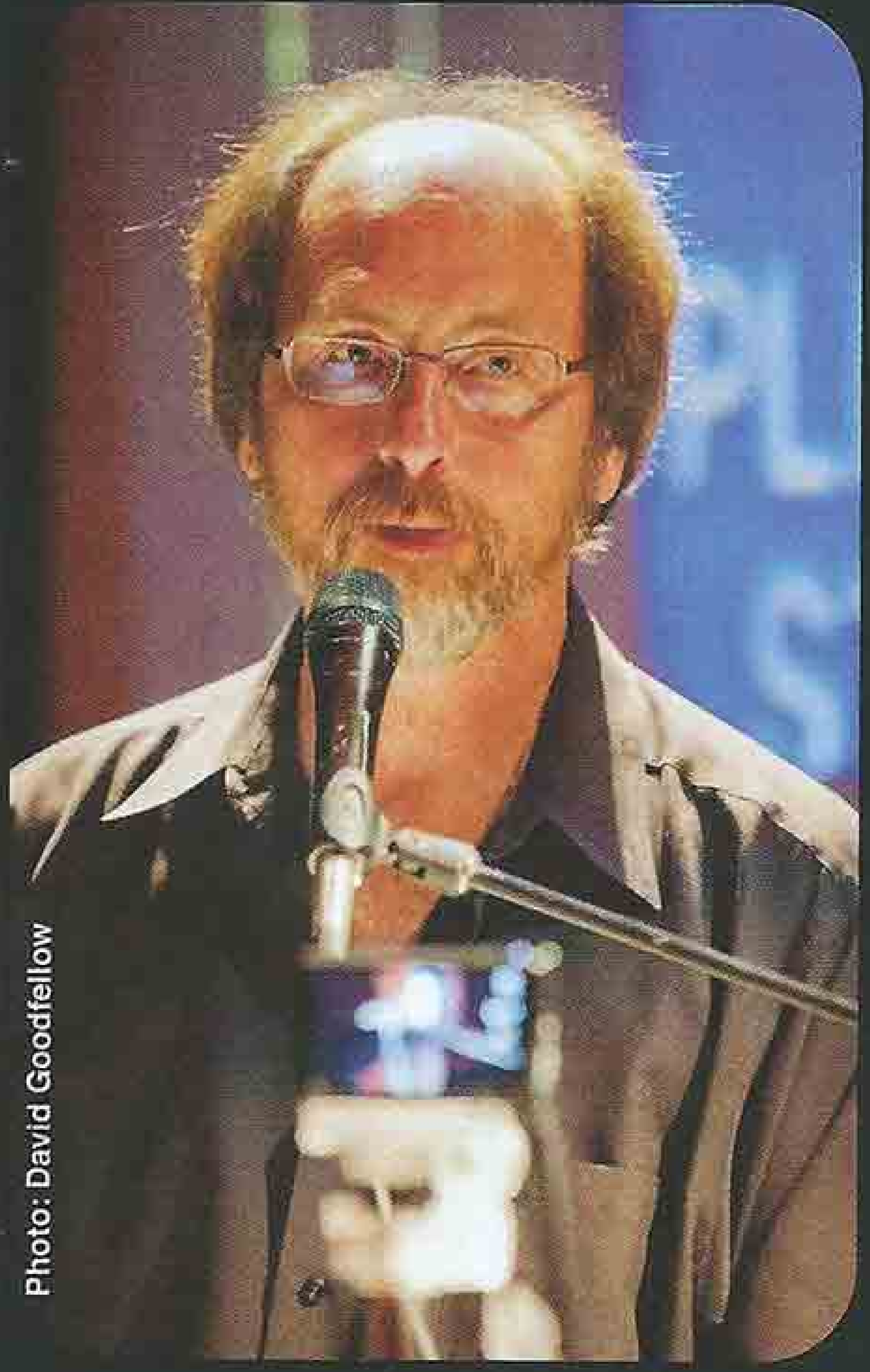
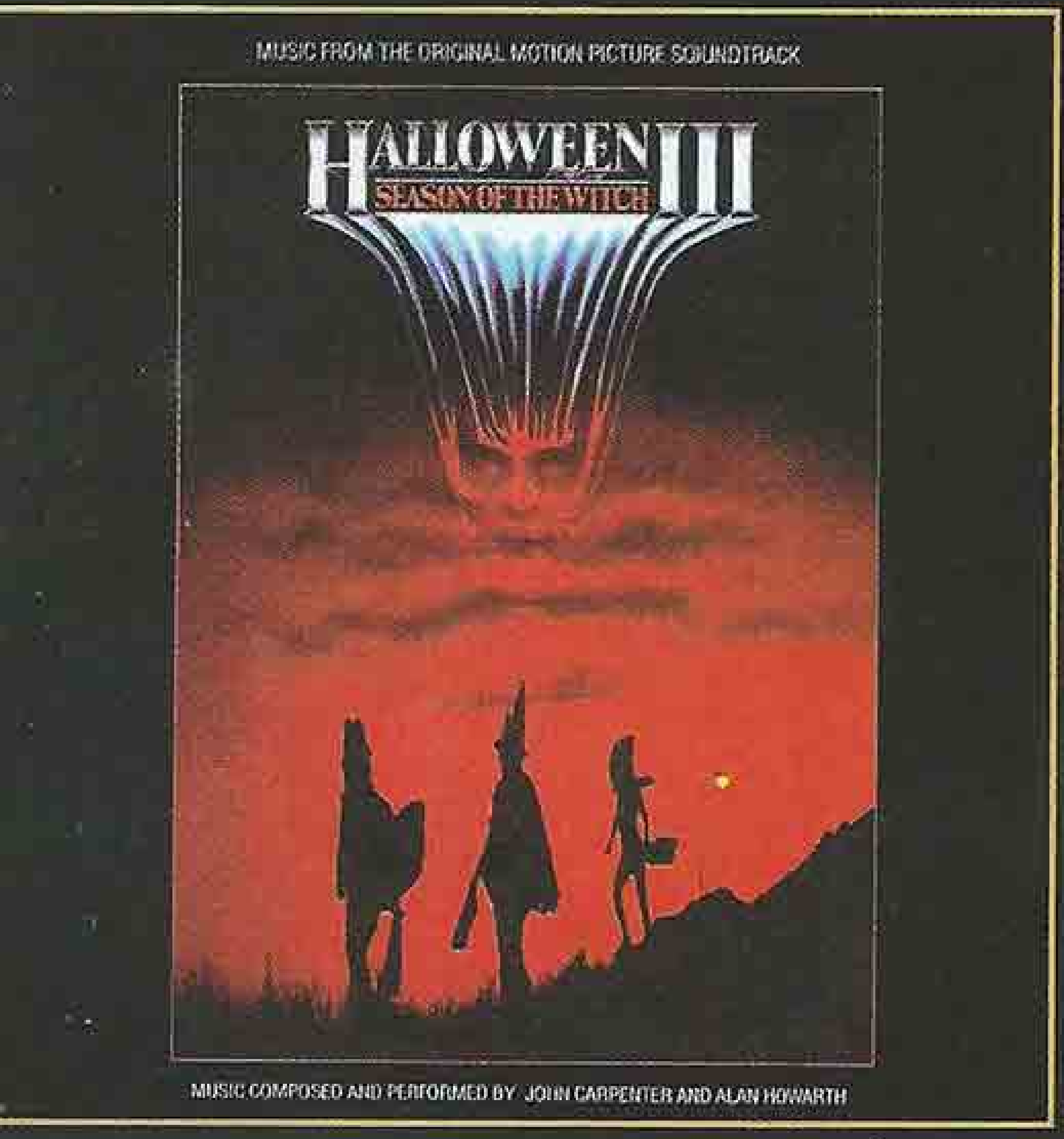


Photo: David Goodfellow

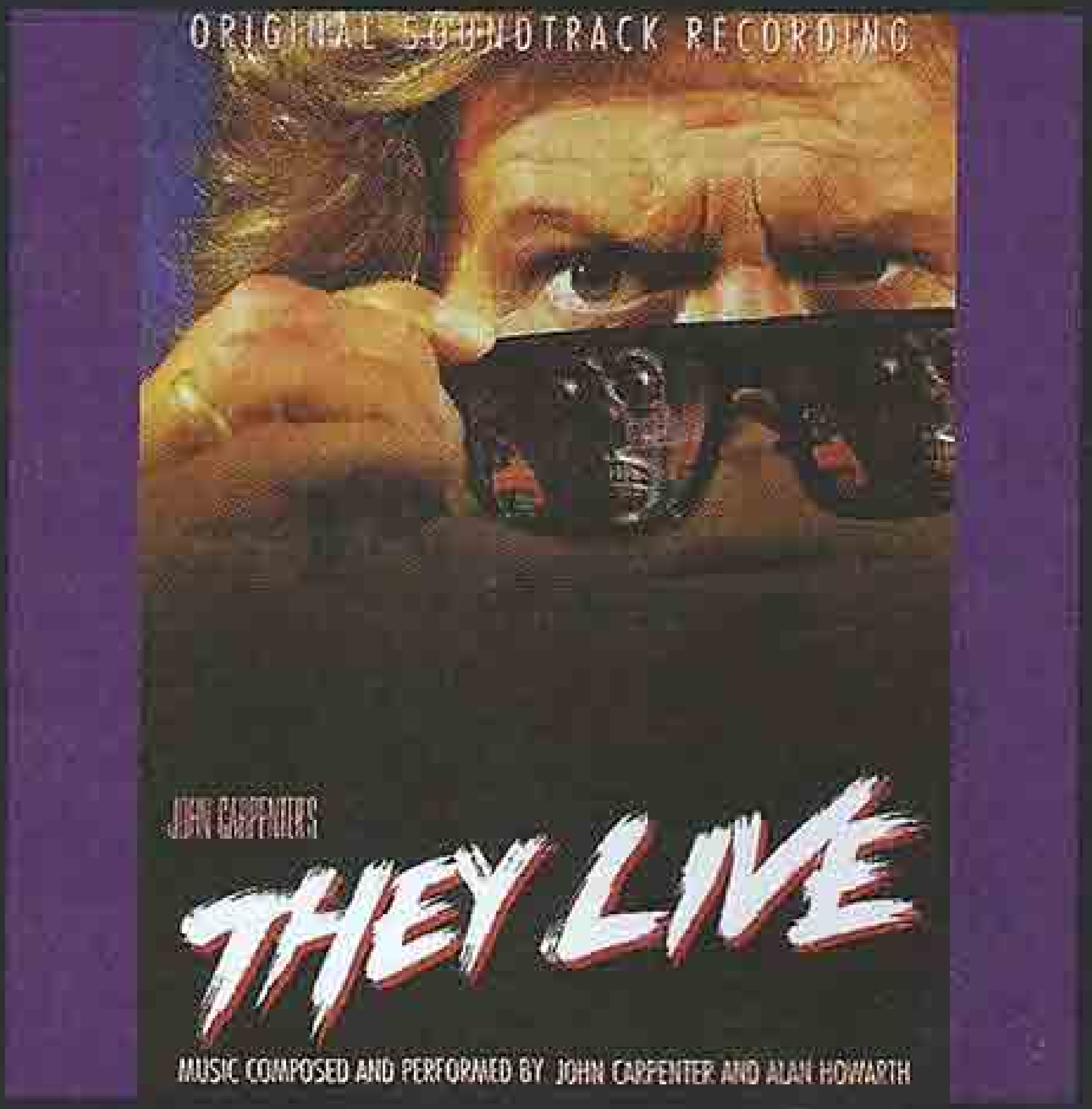
Renowned sound FX creator, film score composer and John Carpenter's frequent scoring collaborator Alan Howarth has been involved in the world of music almost his entire life. He studied music theory, played saxophone and sang in the choir in high school. In college, he was bitten by the rock 'n' roll bug, joining a number of bands like The Tree Stumps and The Silk, the latter of which opened for legendary acts like The Who and Steppenwolf. Supplementing his income by working at a music store, he learned how to repair synthesizers and set up his own home recording studio.

Eventually, a friend working at Paramount recommended Howarth as a synthesizer whiz who could create electronic sound FX (specifically, the warp engines for the Starship *Enterprise*) for what would become his first movie credit, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Which proves, as Howarth puts it, "The good news for everybody out there is that there *is* life after rock 'n' roll."

From there, Howarth's first major gig as a film composer was a classic sci-fi/action movie with a beloved electronic soundtrack. "The scoring part came about because the picture editor on *Star Trek* was Todd Ramsay, and his next assignment was *Escape from New York*. He originally introduced me to the project to be a sound effects guy, but he had enough tapes of my music to introduce me to John Carpenter. John came over to my little dining-room studio in Glendale, we sat around for a half hour playing music and sounds and he just said, 'Yeah, it's good.' All of a sudden, I was John Carpenter's scoring partner, and that launched my whole career."


MUSIC FROM THE ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
HALLOWEEN III
SEASON OF THE WITCH
MUSIC COMPOSED AND PERFORMED BY JOHN CARPENTER AND ALAN HOWARTH

One thing that has changed very little in the movie-viewing public's mind is the notion that electronic scores are a cheaper alternative—that they're chosen due to budgetary as opposed to aesthetic reasons. "There's a perception that synthesizer scores are cheap, because there's no orchestra; a guy sits in a room and creates this stuff," Howarth notes. "It was a golden opportunity to hook up with John, who was already using synthesizers and was a composer himself. We started recording to analog 24-track machines, playing every track by hand—no sequencing—and continued to grow to digital samplers, MIDI sequencers, the Linn drum machine and the ability to push one note on a keyboard and trigger nine others at the same time, so the depth and thickness of the sounds we could make really expanded. And now, here we are today with the whole thing literally on a laptop computer. I embrace the technology and recognize its capabilities, and it's pretty wonderful—but with the caveat that there is something about the old way that created a sound the new way does not."

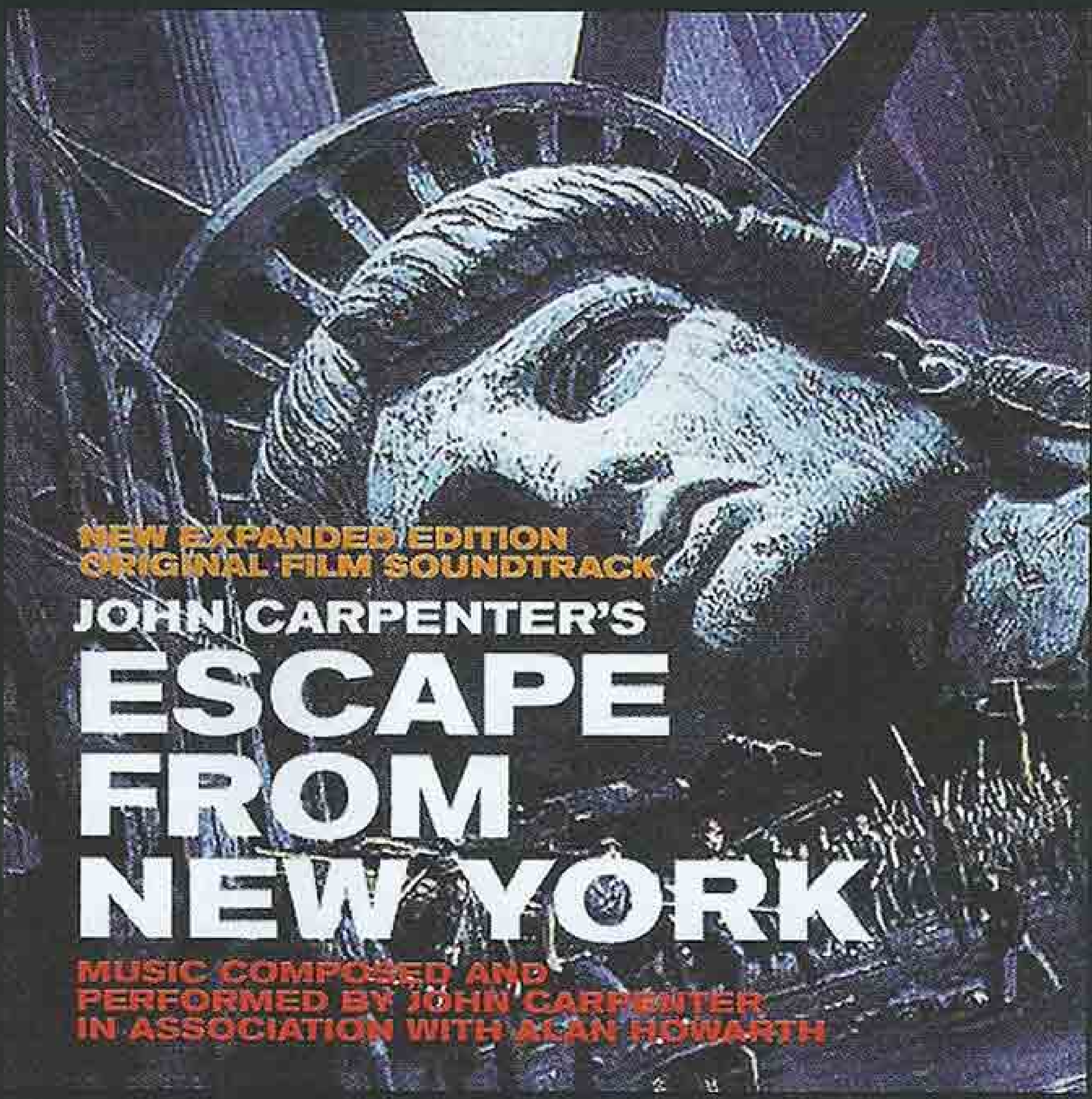

ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK RECORDING
JOHN CARPENTER'S
THEY LIVE
MUSIC COMPOSED AND PERFORMED BY JOHN CARPENTER AND ALAN HOWARTH

Any artistic collaboration is fraught with the possibility of battling egos—especially in the world of music. Having collaborated on seven pictures to date, Howarth and Carpenter were able to find a composing process that worked for both of them. "Since John wrote and directed the movies and sat through the edits, it made the most sense to dial up a great sound and let him go for it. So on pretty much all the cues, he would do the first pass and play the first inspirations, but there was a lot of improvising where we'd turn on the machines and just go. What I brought to the table technically was the idea of synchronizing the videotape and the audiotape recorder—which seems logical today, but prior to that, all his scoring was done to a stopwatch, where you'd watch the movie and compose to a click track, so the synchronization was done at the music editorial level rather than creating scores to picture. When I got the synchronization concept running, he just loved it—he called it the 'electronic coloring book.'

"So a lot of those great melodies are John's," Howarth continues. "He's a trained musician and plays violin, keyboards and guitar, and his father was a concert violinist. But I also brought my stuff to it; the environment was that anybody could do anything they wanted. So if I had an idea and wanted to add something or take a pass playing to an already recorded cue, it was a totally open ticket, and John was gracious enough to share the writing credit with me. It was just two guys having a good time in the studio making music for his movies."

"John was very active in pioneering a couple of white boys from Hollywood jumping into the world of Hong Kong stuff."

Even though Carpenter didn't actually write any new music for *Halloween II*, he is credited as composer with Howarth. Certainly, one of the most famous pieces of score in horror-film history returned in the sequel, but even though he technically wasn't there, Carpenter still performed a sizable amount of the film's music. As



ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
HALLOWEEN II
Music Composed and Performed by JOHN CARPENTER
in association with ALAN HOWARTH

MUSIC FROM THE MOTION PICTURE
JOHN CARPENTER'S
THE THING
MUSIC COMPOSED BY
ENNIO MORRICONE
PRODUCED BY ALAN HOWARTH
ARRANGED BY LARRY HOPKINS

Howarth explains, "We'd just finished *Escape from New York*, I'd established myself with him and he had confidence in me and we had a lot of fun, and then *Halloween II* came up. John was already booked on *The Thing*, so one afternoon during a mixing session, John told me they were doing the sequel and he'd be busy, so I'd be doing *Halloween II*. It was like an assignment. John had created that iconic *Halloween* score with Dan Wyman; I got ahold of that 16-track master tape and did a transfer to a 24-track master, so I had a bunch of open tracks. I then overdubbed the Alan Howarth stuff, which gave it a more Gothic texture. I thickened it up, but still used his performance as the lead.

"Then there were a few moments in *Halloween II* where the original score didn't fit, or it was a new kind of scene that needed fresh music, so at that point I did more stuff on my own. But the score is so married to [the original]; John created this musical vocabulary you use for a *Halloween* movie. At that time, *Halloween II* was going to be the end of the trail, so we needed to create just one more score from those materials—sort of new and improved, with extra bells and whistles."

Halloween II, of course, was not the end of the trail. "*Halloween III* was only my second scoring session with John, after he'd gone off and done *The Thing*. Ennio Morricone composed that score, and he did it in two passes. The first was the orchestral part that you hear underpinning many scenes, and when John heard that, he played the *Escape from New York* soundtrack for Morricone and said, 'Can you give me something like this?' Then there was a second pass, where he came back with Morricone doing Carpenter. That first pass was created before the movie [had been shot], just based on concepts; then he saw a rough cut when he did that second round with just synthesizers, which gave us that iconic opening theme with the dog and the helicopter.

"All that music was edited in as the movie crystallized; Morricone had long since moved on. At the very tail end, after having put in all the Morricone stuff, John came over for an afternoon and we did a couple of cues to fill in the same audio palette as *Escape*, which eventually became the sound of *Christine* as well. Those extra cues are on the rerecorded *The Thing* CD I did for BSX Records, which is now the definitive recording.

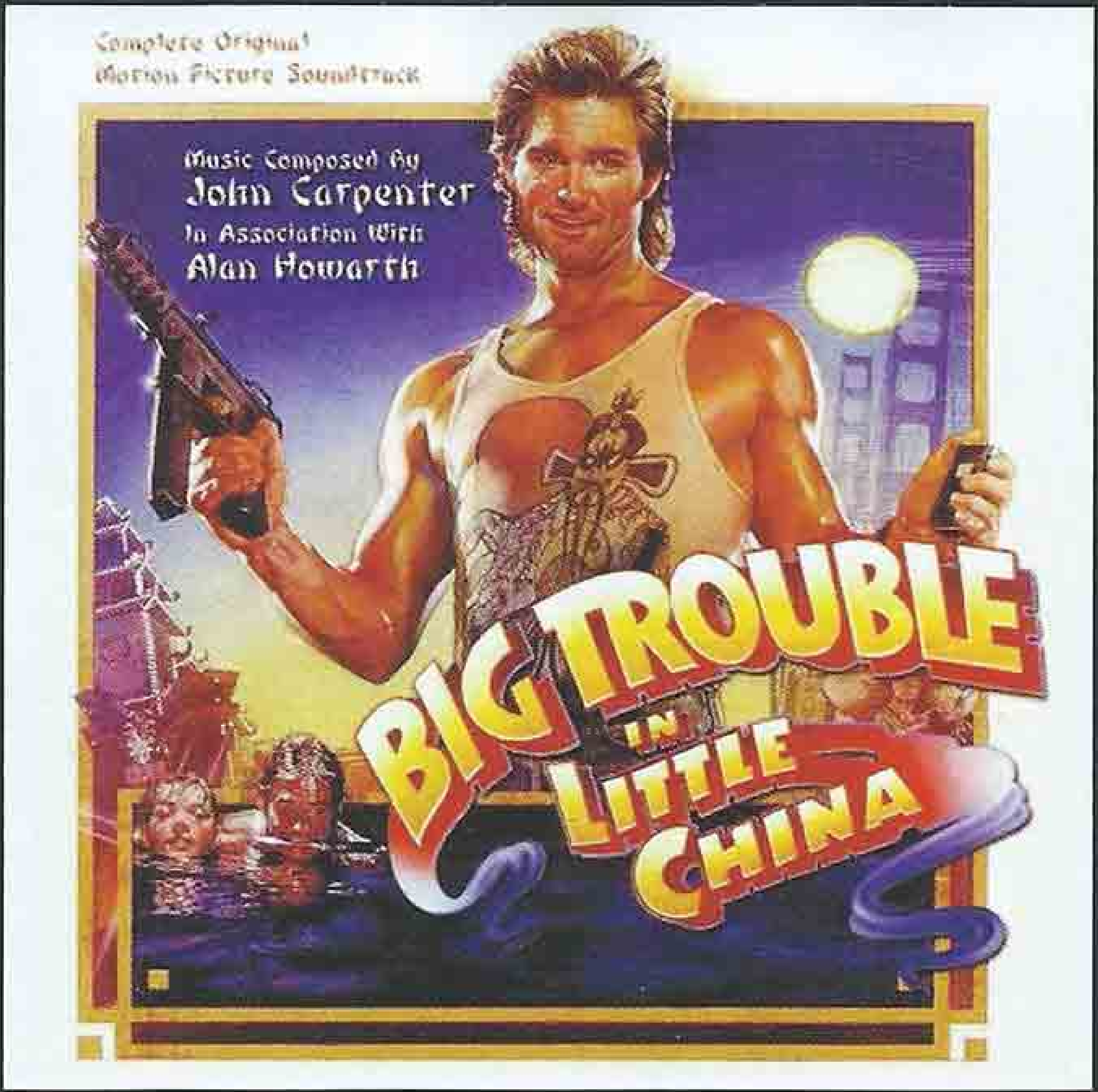
"That led us to *Big Trouble in Little China*," Howarth continues. "John was very active in pioneering a couple of white boys from Hollywood jumping into the world of kung fu and Hong Kong stuff. I was on board for a fairly long time, and it was also sort of the apex of the technology, where I had a Kurzweil 250 and an Emulator II in addition to all my analog equipment. I believe in many ways it's our finest music together, because we had the most time. Normally, you get around six weeks to do a score, but because there was so much going on with optical effects, etc., we had a total of about 14 weeks on *Big Trouble*. Because the movie had comedy and suspense and horror and rock 'n' roll, it touched on so many areas, and it's one of my favorites."

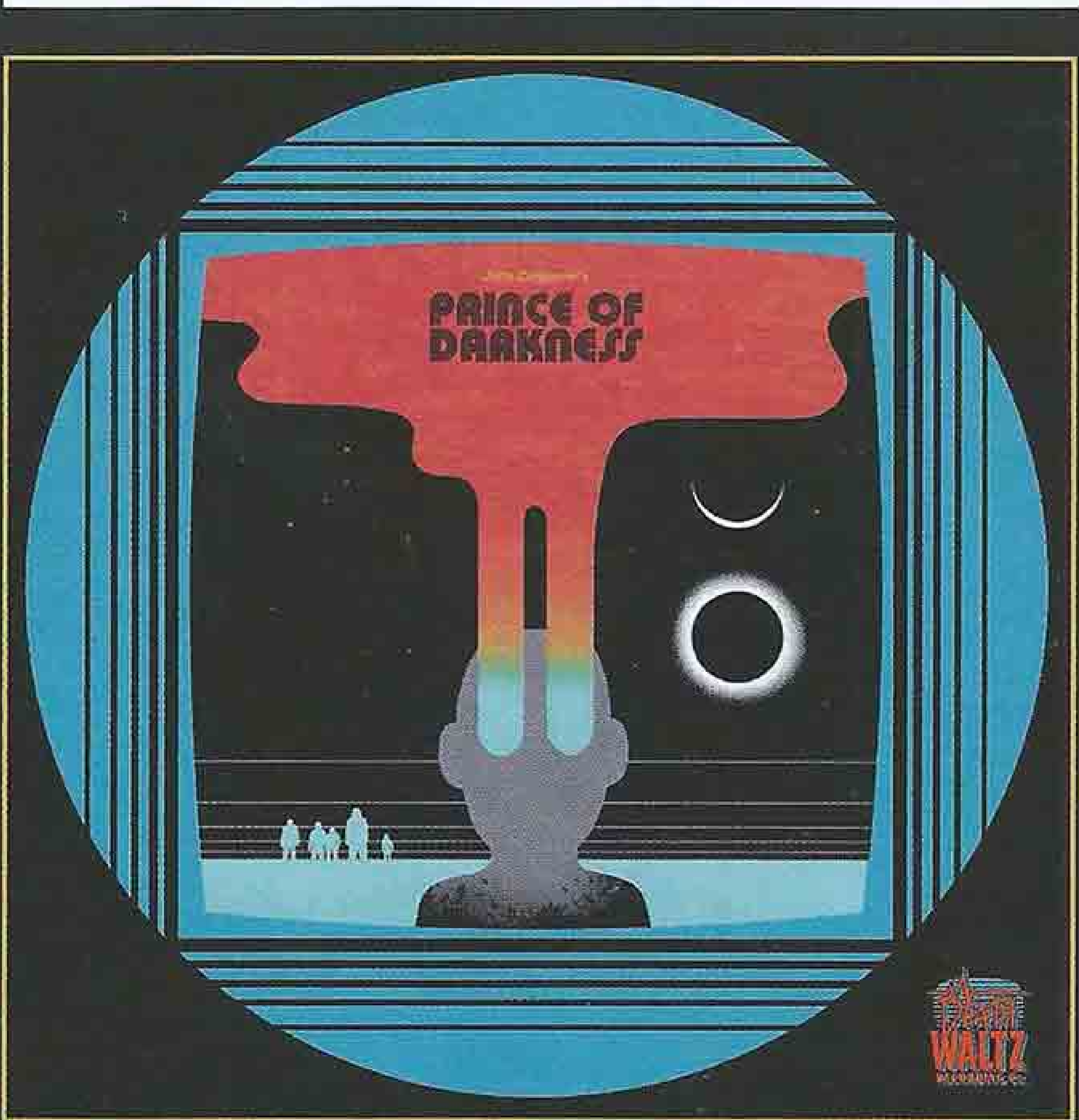
Howarth was then able to apply all that well-financed experience when Carpenter returned to the realm of modestly budgeted horror. "Coming off *Big Trouble* to do *Prince of Darkness*," he recalls, "it was basically the same setup in the studio. We were back on a horror score, but now we had orchestral samples and all this choir stuff. We used that element to give the music an ethereal foolin'-with-the-devil texture. So that one benefitted from all the technology and sequencing I'd set up. It was a combination of freehand playing and the Emulator II arpeggiator being recorded into a sequencer, so I could then grab things for further editorial, whereas up until that point, we had literally played it all live."

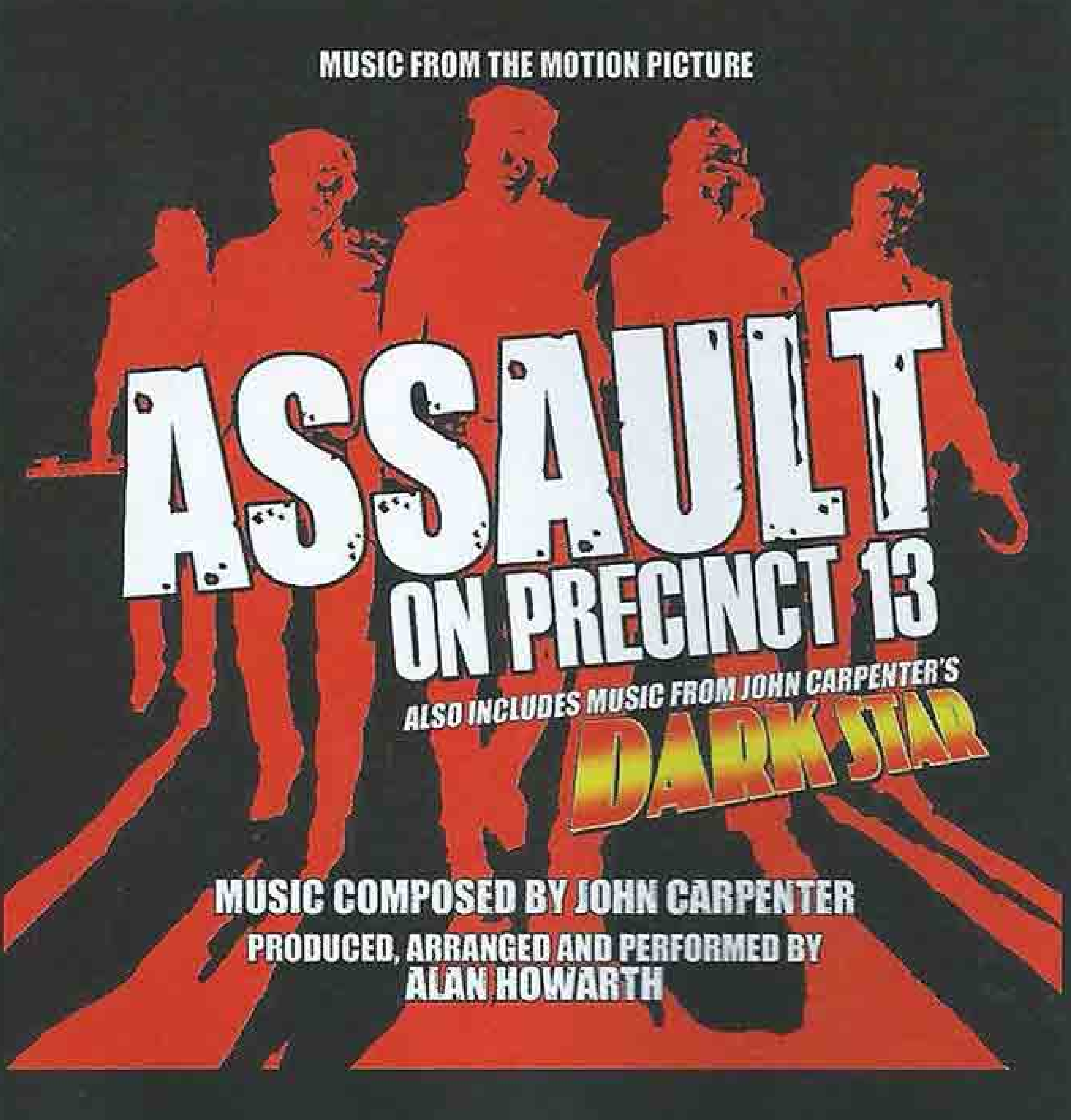
From there, the duo moved directly to *They Live*, for which Howarth added a Synclavier system. "It was there just sort of as a test flight, but I remember one definitive moment when I sampled John's voice for the effect of the alien commands—'Sleep,' 'Obey,' etc.—and slowed it down. Now I had 100K samples that were completely amazing, and I could actually speed them up and slow them down and have all sorts of crazy electronic effects happening, which was a new kind of texture at the time. We also had a new fleet of samples that came with the Synclavier, with strings, saxophones, guitars, harmonicas—all kinds of stuff. *They Live* wanted to be a blues score, because we were sort of bluesing out in LA, so it sounds different from the previous horror soundtracks."

They Live does indeed sport memorably eclectic music that, appropriate to its alien-invasion theme, takes familiar musical sounds and bends them out of shape, giving them a strangely artificial feel. "There was one cue that John actually played the harmonica for, when Roddy Piper is walking around by the campfire at night. That's John playing live, but the other stuff was samples. The Synclavier was the big guy then, while the Emulator was the challenger, but both had their own qualities in 8-bit and 16-bit sampling. Combined with the analog synths, which were the electronic basis of all our scores, it became another tool in the kit."

Lately, Howarth has been remastering his Carpenter collaborations, in some instances even doing full rerecordings of classic scores he didn't originally work on. One such recent effort was a double-feature CD from BSX pairing the soundtracks of *Assault on Precinct 13* and *Dark Star*. For the reissue disc of *Escape from New York* a few years back, Howarth rebuilt the 30-year-old audio from scratch. "It's a full remix. I went all the way back to the 24-track masters, retransferred them, went in and digitally cut out all the silence which would have been just tape hiss, so sonically, we cleaned it all up. The ability to rebalance things was right there."


Complete Original Motion Picture Soundtrack
Music Composed By John Carpenter In Association With Alan Howarth
BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA




MUSIC FROM THE MOTION PICTURE
ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13
ALSO INCLUDES MUSIC FROM JOHN CARPENTER'S
DARK STAR
MUSIC COMPOSED BY JOHN CARPENTER
PRODUCED, ARRANGED AND PERFORMED BY
ALAN HOWARTH

Last year saw Silva Screen Records' much-anticipated two-CD release of Carpenter's score for *The Fog*, with similarly revelatory results. "I mixed the first CD release of *The Fog* without referring back to mixes from the movie itself," Howarth points out, "so that's the 1983 release with my first mixes. Somehow, during the process, I wound up with the original quarter-inch mixes of *The Fog*, which I discovered in 2006 while I was doing some cleaning. So I approached Silva Screen and said I had the original mono mixes, so why not transfer all that material, and I'd do a stereoized new version. I took the liberty of compositing all this raw material into what I refer to as the linear score for *The Fog*, so the cues happen in the order they do in the movie. I also did a little extra sound design, adding foghorns and certain ambiences from the film. My goal was to recreate the sonic ride, so you can put it on and watch the movie in your mind's eye as you listen to the soundtrack."

Howarth is a busy man these days, and he's doing a lot more than just revisiting past audio glories. "People come to me and say, 'Hey, I love what you did with John Carpenter; can you do something like that for me?' So I've done a lot of scores since then, including *Halloween 4*, *5* and *6*, where I was still sort of revisiting John. But I still have my own voice; I am who I am, and the beauty is I get invited to be Alan Howarth the composer. I'm not asked to come in and be Hans Zimmer Jr. or James Horner Jr.; people want me to do these electronic scores and work with the instruments and where my skill set is now. After 30-some years, I've pretty much got it down, so it's a lot of fun to do a film score now, because for the most part the director or producer will drop the movie off, we'll do a spotting session and say the music goes here and here, and then they'll go away and let me do my thing."

Among the new films in which his music can be heard is *Brutal*, directed by Darla Rae and scripter/star Michael Patrick Stevens and also featuring A. Michael Baldwin from the *Phantasm* franchise. "It's a really intense movie, and I gave it my all in the score. We did some screenings in Kansas City, and we had six people walk out and one person throw up. I did another one called *House at the End of the Drive* [directed by genre veteran David Worth], which is very interesting. It's about a fella named David Allman who built a house on the driveway of the site of the Sharon Tate murders. He claims his house is haunted by Tate and the other people who were killed, and tells the story of a situation where they go into a time warp and find themselves back in 1969. That was way fun for me, because I was doing the music I grew up on. I got to do '60s rock guitar and stuff like that.

"Another recent project was a horror version of *Hansel & Gretel* with director Anthony C. Ferrante, whom I've worked with twice before, with Dee Wallace as the star. I'm still having a great time scoring films. I like working; I don't like *not* working. It's more about the project than the dollar signs—although you do have to get paid for these things."

With his solo career keeping him as busy as he's ever been, one possible project on the horizon is a completely new version of *Escape from New York* for the modern age, complete with beats and other contemporary sounds. Always keeping a cautious glance over his shoulder while continually moving forward, Howarth reflects upon what he's learned and the legacy that lies ahead of him.

> **“John played the *Escape from New York* soundtrack for [Ennio] Morricone and said, ‘Can you give me something like this?’ ”**

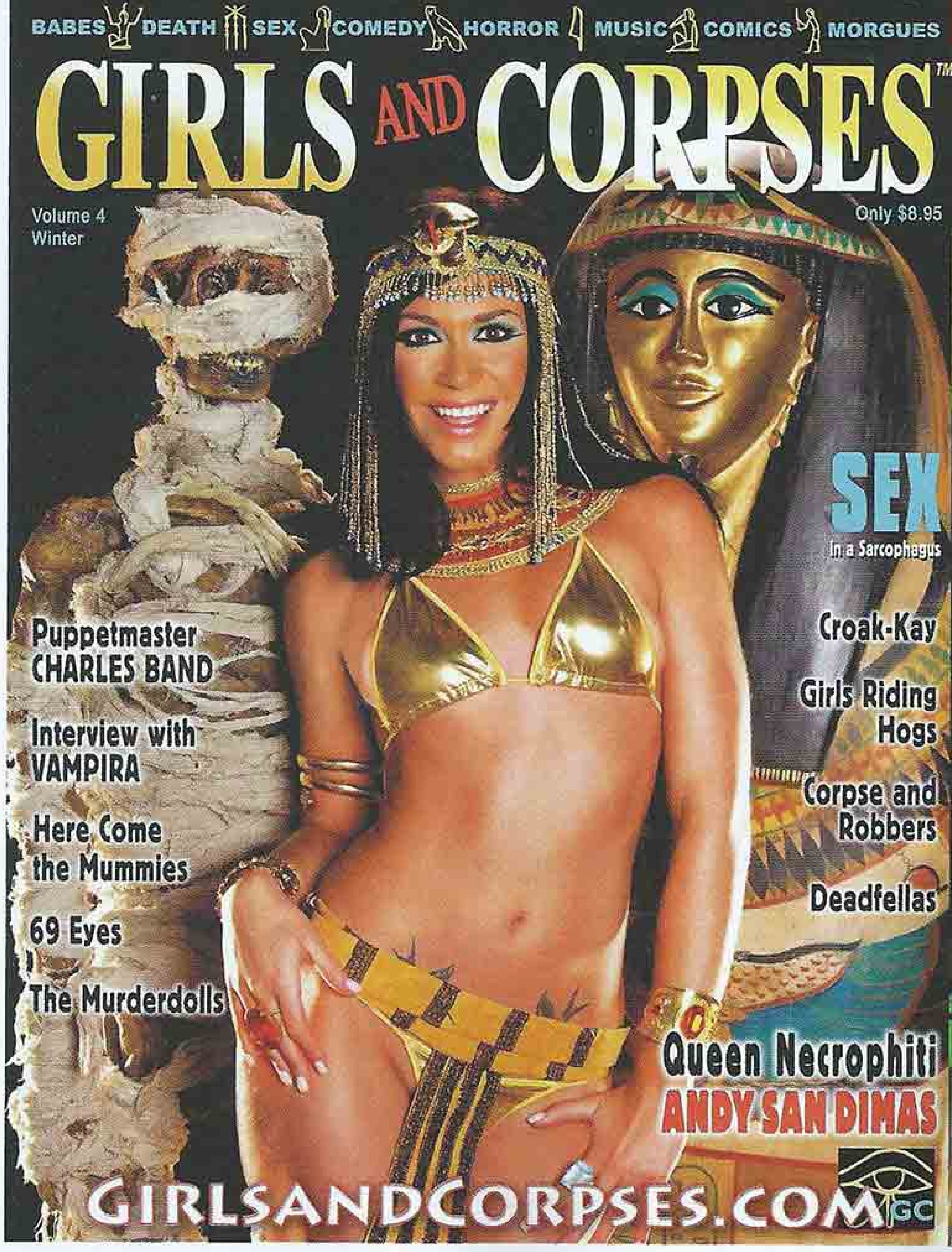
“Everything we did was picture-driven; we were creating music not for the sake of making music, but to be, as John said, the carpet that lives underneath the foundation of the scene. Whatever is going on, it's still about the actors and the story. One of the great quotes from John is when he referred to the scores as ‘the director's velvet glove’—a way to touch people without them knowing you're touching them, and direct their feelings and their emotions. That's the kind of stuff John was a master of, and still is. It was great to pioneer with him and go down paths no one had gone down before, because there were new instruments and new technologies. At the time, we were just a couple of guys working in a studio and having a blast, but time has stamped it as stuff that's truly valid and has lasted now for a second and maybe even a third generation of filmgoers who recognize it as timeless. It still holds up.”

Photo: David Goodfellow

The keyboards change, but Howarth's dedication to cinematic electronica remains the same.

For more information about Howarth's current projects, his continuing exploration of RA Music and some very cool autographed merchandise, check out his website at www.alanhowarth.com.

We're dying to meet you!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Mister HYDE
Mike MAGGOT
GC
LLOYD KAUFMAN VS. MOSH IN THE
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Tromatized MAN WITH NO BRAIN SPEAKS
Jacqui Holland SILENT BUT DEADLY
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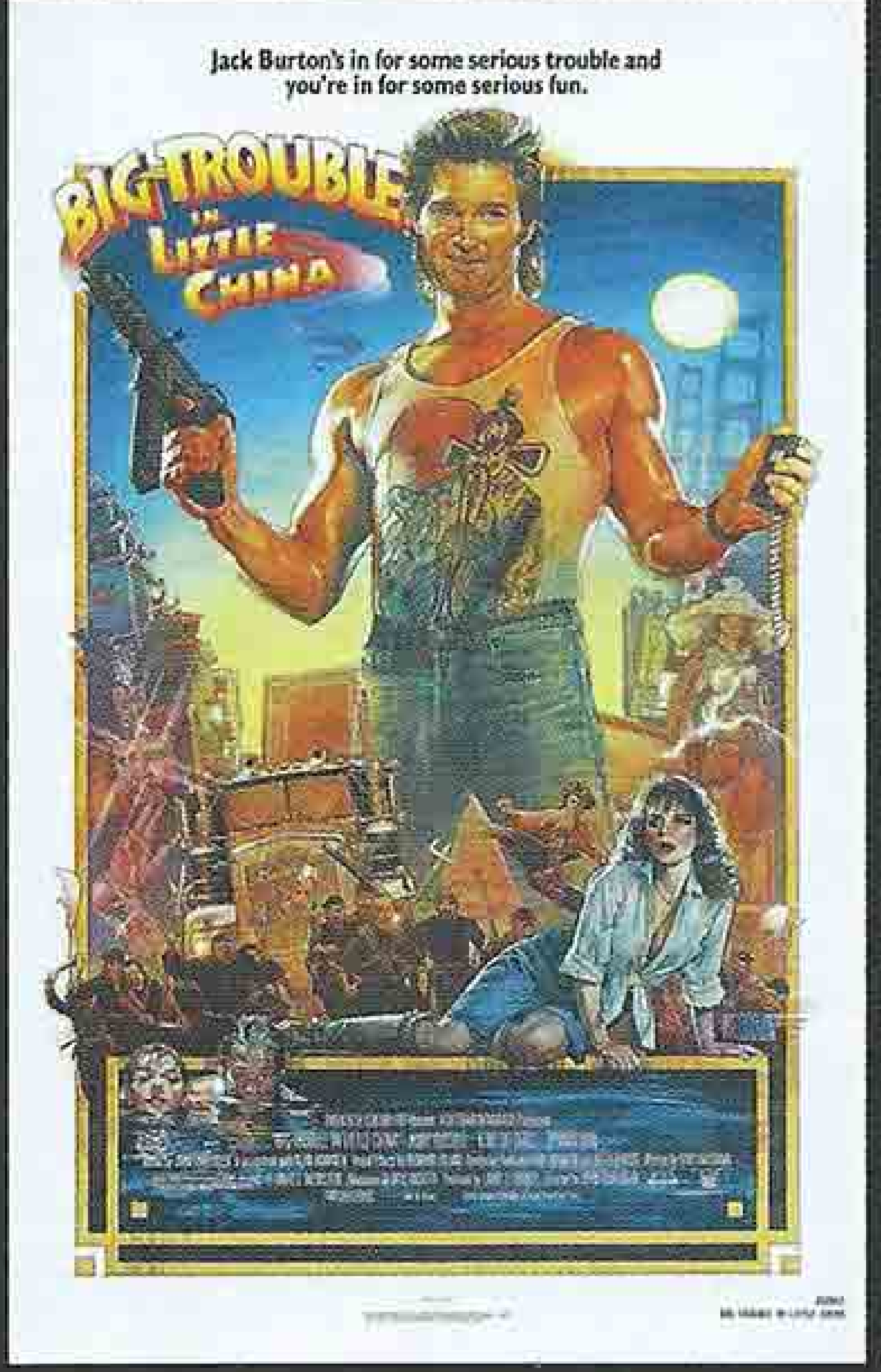
BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA

Swords, sorcery and silliness


Jack Burton's in for some serious trouble and you're in for some serious fun.
BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA

Big Trouble in Little China represents another case, after *The Thing* (see page 26), of John Carpenter standing ahead of the curve. A decade and a half before *The Matrix* and *Charlie's Angels* pretended to introduce U.S. audiences to Asian-style martial-arts action, Carpenter was inspired by the likes of Tsui Hark's *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* to enter a world of magic, monsters, swordsmen and sorcerors, where the laws of humans and gravity don't necessarily apply.

Given that Carpenter has spent much of his career reinventing the Western through various other genres, it's only fitting that *Big Trouble in Little China* started out as a sagebrush saga. Gary Goldman and David Z. Weinstein's original screenplay was set in the Old West, where a cowboy hero finds himself in an imaginary Chinatown. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) scripter W.D. Richter, who had demonstrated a knack for a more off-the-wall, humorous brand of sci-fi in his directorial debut *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*, was hired to transpose the story to the present day and give it his distinctive lighter touch. It was that draft that snagged Carpenter, who had wanted to explore Asian themes for some time; he and Richter had previously teamed to develop a film version of Eric Van Lustbader's best-selling novel *The Ninja*.

The final piece of the colorful puzzle was Kurt Russell, teaming with Carpenter for the fourth time to play a character far less serious than Elvis Presley, Snake Plissken or R.J. MacReady. His Jack Burton is a blustery trucker who finds himself neck-deep in Chinese mythology and monsters after stopping in San Francisco's Chinatown to hang out with old friend Wang Chi (Dennis Dun). When he accompanies his pal to the airport to pick up Wang's fiancée Miao Yin (Suzee Pai), they instead witness her abduction by the minions of Lo Pan (James Hong), lord of the local underworld who is actually a centuries-old demon. That leads them into conflict with vicious gangs, assorted monsters and Lo Pan's martial-arts-master henchmen known as the Three Storms: Thunder (Carter Wong), Lightning (James Pax) and Rain (Peter Kwong).

Carpenter gleefully mixes and matches assorted cinematic influences in *Big Trouble in Little China* to come up with an energetic, exciting and funny whole. For that extra touch of Western influence, Russell delivers his lines with a John Wayne drawl, adding another level of humor to the central joke of his role: Jack Burton's a bumbling sidekick who thinks he's the hero. Beyond the straight-faced, very action-adept Wang Chi, Jack's foil is attorney Gracie Law, whom Kim Cattrall gives the fast-paced delivery of the actresses once guided by another of Carpenter's heroes, Howard Hawks.

But most of all, it's about giving American audiences the type of eye-boggling thrills their counterparts in the East had been enjoying for years. In addition to the cast, also including Victor Wong as eccentric tour-bus driver Egg Shen and Donald Li as Wang Chi's good buddy Eddie, Carpenter and his producers hired on a then-unprecedented number of Chinese-American behind-the-scenes collaborators for a Hollywood production. These included the team responsible for the movie's action: martial-arts choreographer/associate producer James Lew, martial-arts consultant/associate producer/technical advisor Jim Lau and stunt coordinator Kenny Endoso, as well as the combatants who chop, kick and hurtle their way through the epic fight setpieces (among them ubiquitous '80s bad-ass Al Leong as the head of the Wing Kong gang).

All the excitement takes place amidst remarkable sets whipped up by production designer John J. Lloyd, including a three-story section of Chinatown constructed on a soundstage, with the characters clad in extravagant costumes (many crafted from scratch) by April Ferry, all lustrously lensed by Dean Cundey, returning for one last hurrah with the Carpenter clan. The director and Alan Howarth back it up with perhaps their best score together, eschewing the woodwinds-and-gong clichés usually found in Asian-themed film music for something more original, yet still exotic. And it's topped off by the end-credits theme song by Carpenter, Nick Castle and Tommy Lee Wallace, a.k.a. the Coupe De Villes…oh, that theme song… (Seriously, if you haven't heard it already, check out the video on YouTube.)

Sadly, this still-one-of-a-kind feature didn't catch on upon its first release by 20th Century Fox in summer 1986, but it has lived on as a major cult item, worshipped by fans who love to recite its endless quotable lines ("Son of a bitch must pay!"). The countless American features that have aped Hong Kong stylings since owe *Big Trouble in Little China* a serious debt, and we can only stare those suckers in the eye and say: Have you paid your dues?

—Michael Gingold

Lo Pan (James Hong) has endless reserves of hellish magic to drawn on and stir up *Big Trouble*.

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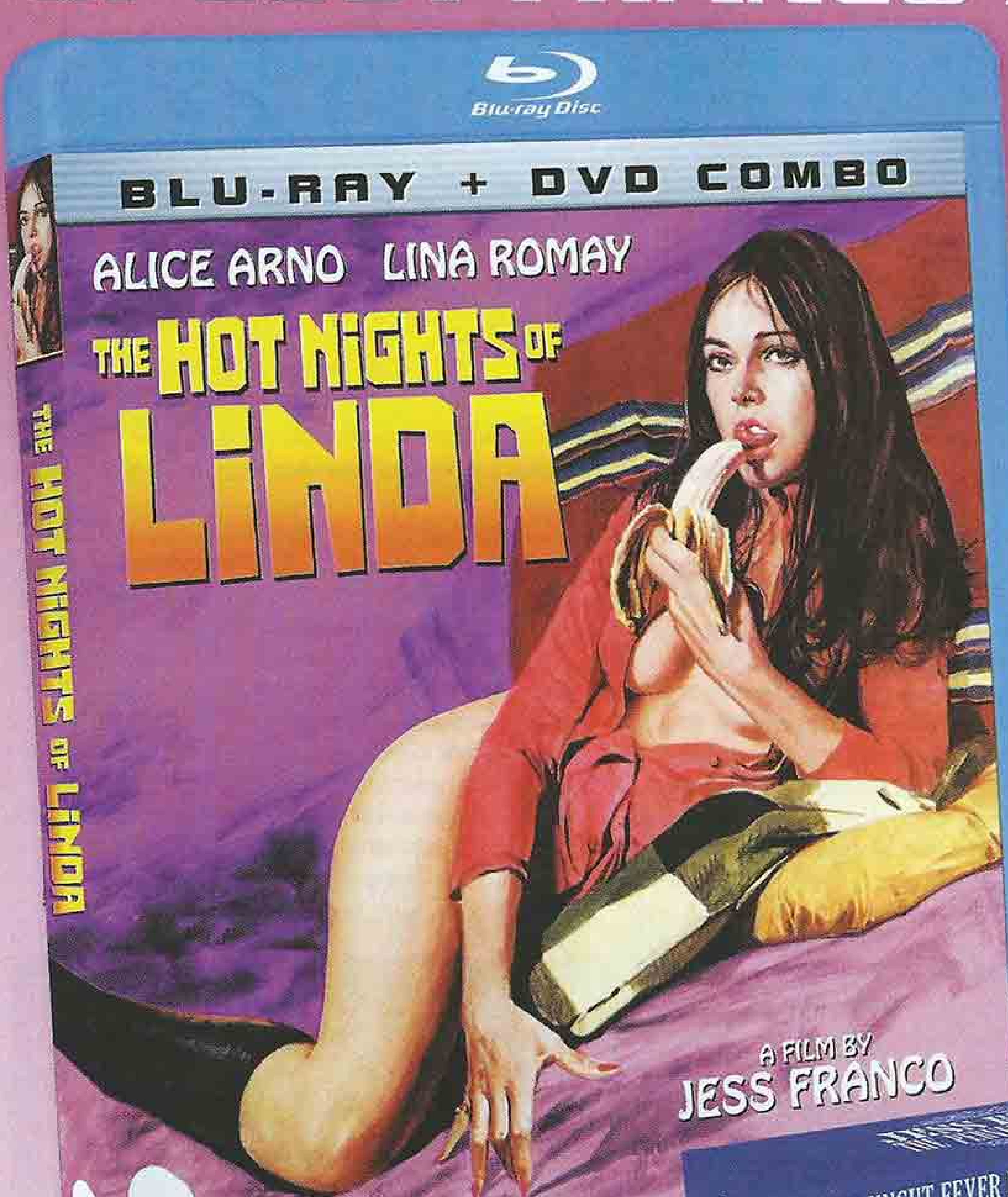
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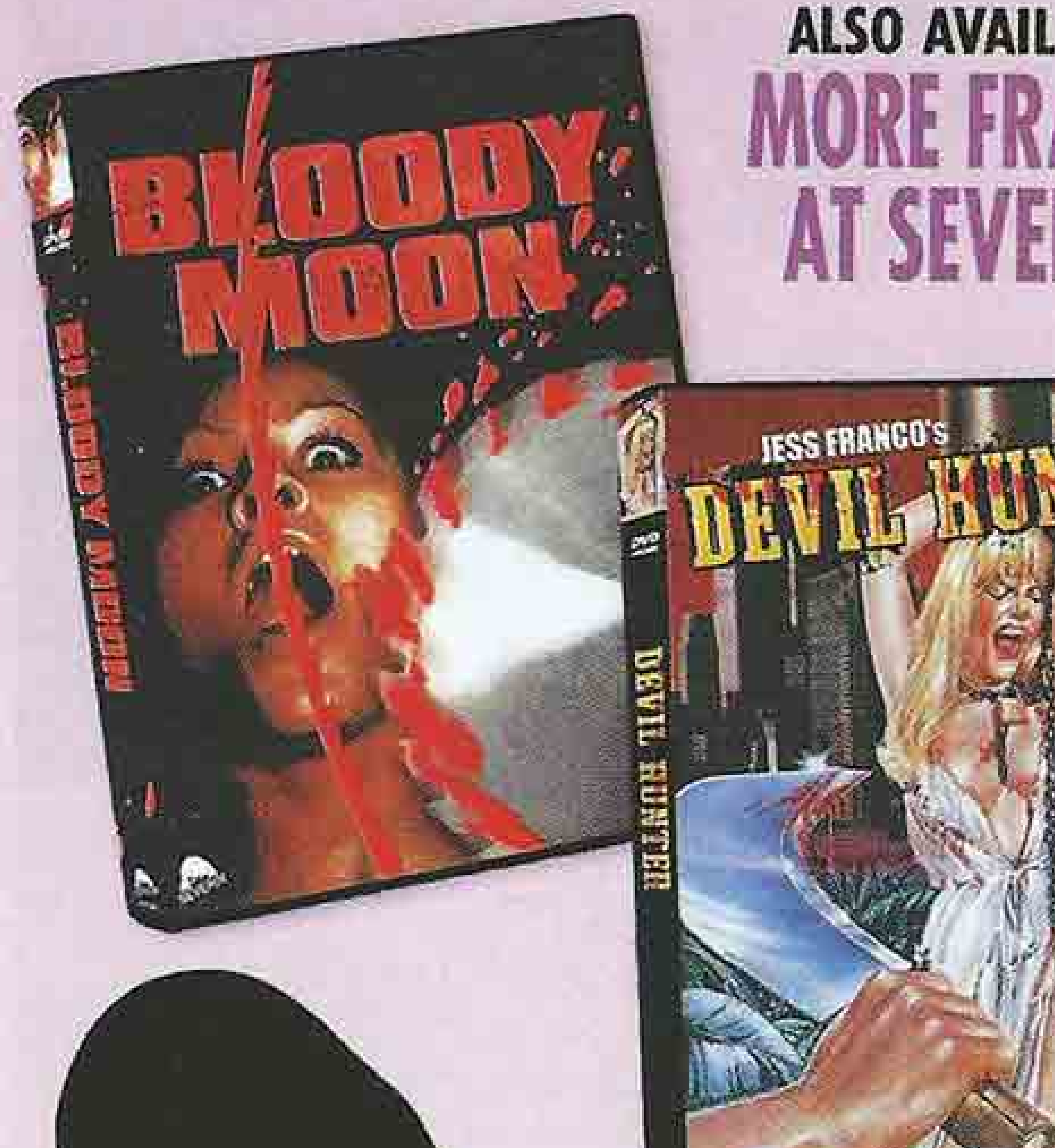
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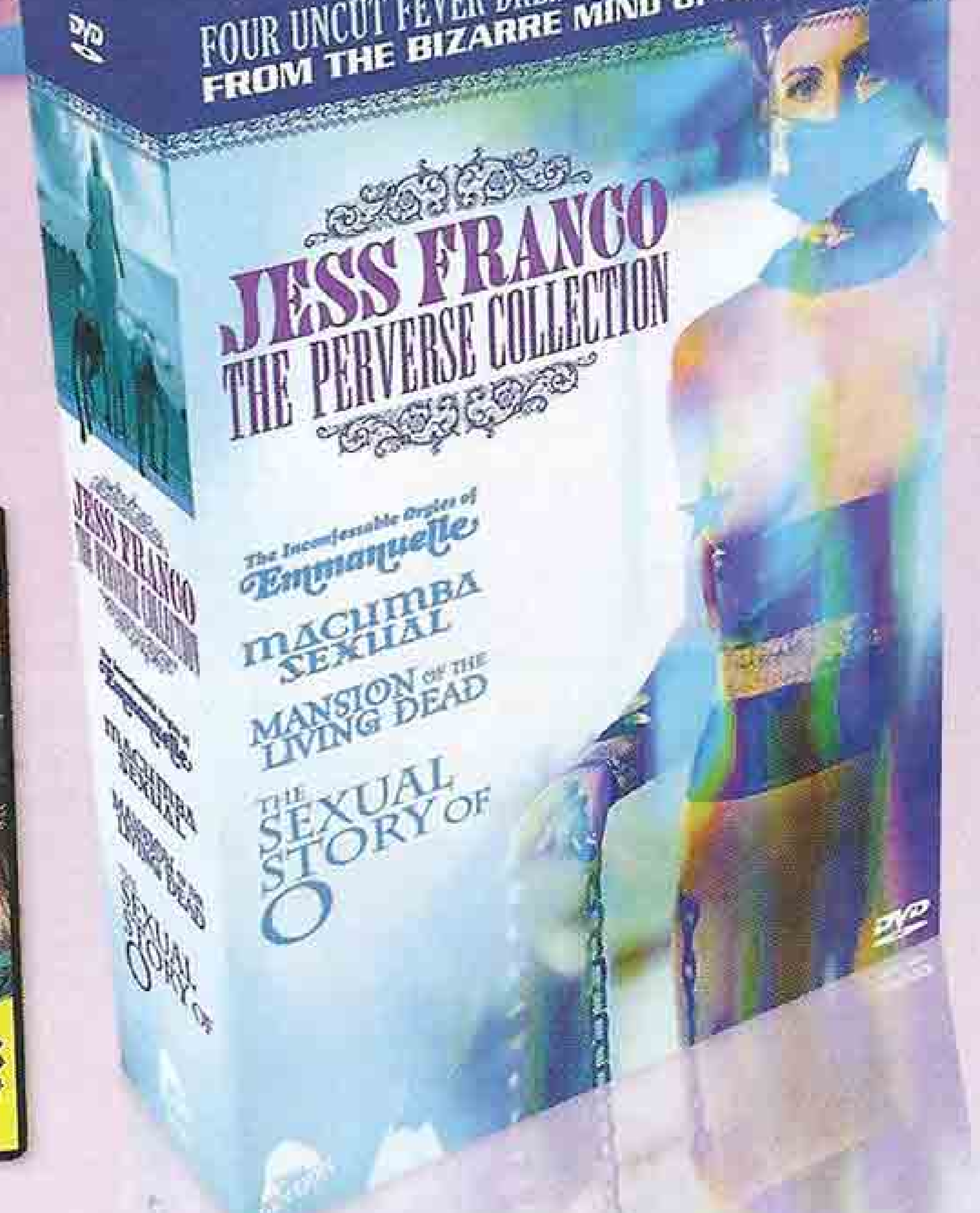
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PRINCE OF DARKNESS

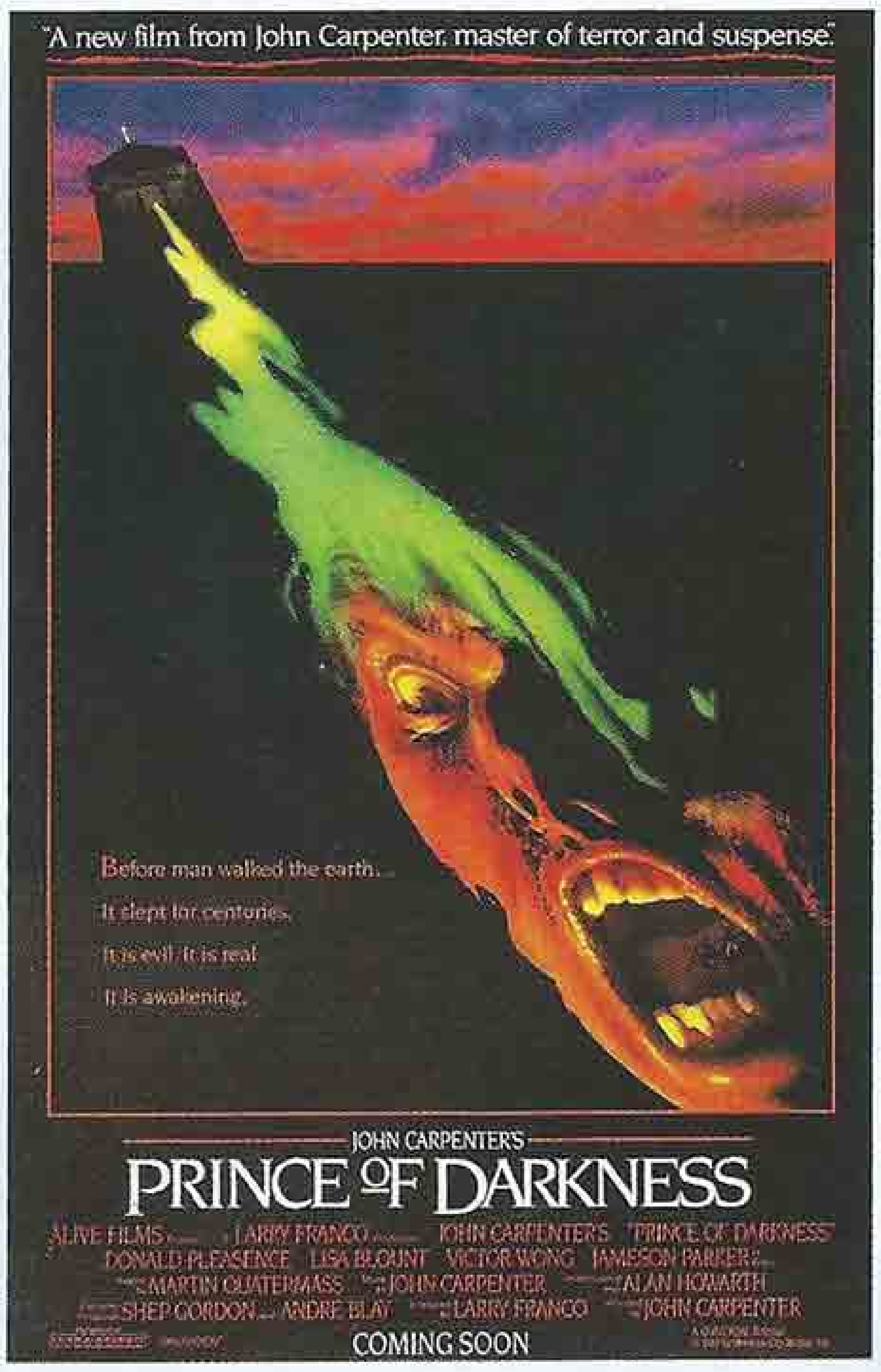
Quantum creeps

Once again, a female vessel for Satan (Susan Blanchard as Kelly) loses her looks as well as her soul.

Prince of Darkness is an often strange, sometimes terrific but in the end flawed movie that defies broad categorization in a genre known for occasionally creating rigid protective boundaries between what constitutes a horror film and what is science fiction, despite obvious crossover between these forms. Sure, *Alien* and *Galaxy of Terror* (to name but two of many) transpose haunted-house tropes into outer space, but rare is the movie that uses theoretical science to explore the nature of our universal fears, and then extrapolates something that posits science and superstition walking hand in hand.

Leave it to John Carpenter to concoct what could well be one of the only horror features that focuses on particle physics for its shock factor. It's clear Carpenter not only did his quantum-theory homework, but was also very imaginative when it came to connecting the dots between ancient religious conceits and the mysteries inherent in this relatively young field of science. In the end, the film—which plays like a fever-dream remembrance of Erich von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* spliced with a body-count flick—doesn't achieve the very high level it sets for itself, but it succeeds at doing the legacy of acknowledged master writer of all genres Nigel Kneale proud—especially as the film *Prince* most lovingly references is Kneale's classic *Quatermass and the Pit*, a genre masterpiece in either its live BBC-TV broadcast or the Hammer film adaptation of that classic show.

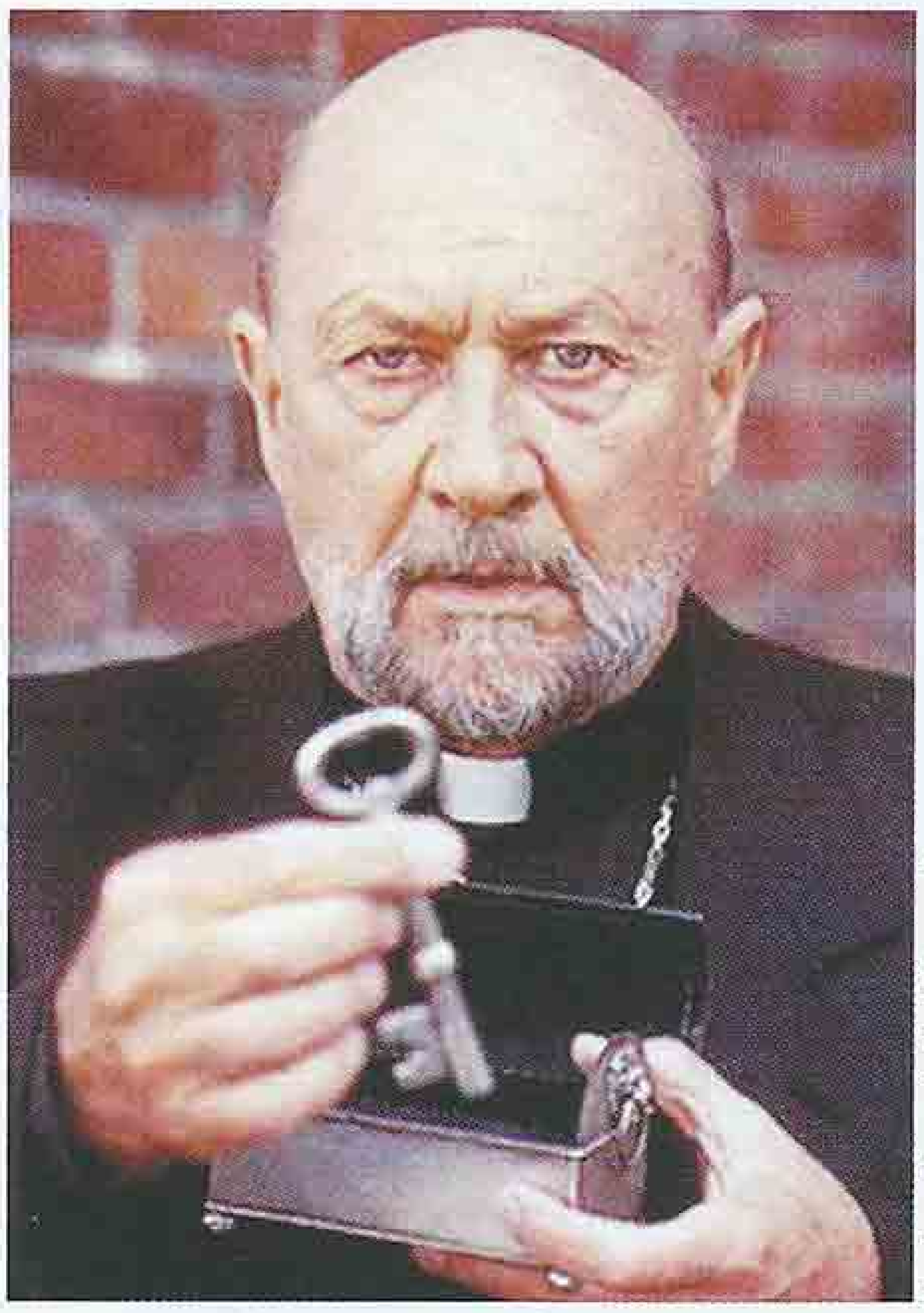
It would also be impossible to discount the effect that working with Kneale on *Halloween III* probably had on this project (and eventually *In the Mouth of Madness*), even if Kneale ultimately had his name removed from the sequel's screenplay credit. Before *Prince*, Carpenter's science fiction films were firmly rooted in the established notions of what that genre consists of—spaceships and aliens and smart computers and fantastic weaponry—but with *Prince*, there is the distinct influence of Kneale's pet themes upon a story that encompasses the confluence between science, religion and folklore to contain the ultimate evil from being unleashed upon the Earth. Carpenter's conjecture that the Church is a thousand-year-old scam put into place to keep the human population under control, until science could evolve to the point of taking action against the supernatural, is an idea Kneale himself would probably have been proud of.



Much like another film that took a risk with audience expectations, John Boorman's *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (a misunderstood examination of the intersection between faith and science), *Prince* also fails when turning toward the more horrific elements, as the sci-fi trappings are the most intriguing part of the equation. Indeed, while science fiction fans are probably more tolerant of horrific elements accidentally spilling over into the edges into their cinema, some horror buffs may be less tolerant of the results of these kinds of crossovers, where the logic of science somehow invades the illogic of what frightens us.

Like the work of an eager fanboy who peppers his movie with characters named after influences, Carpenter's film abounds with namechecks. There's a reference to Kneale University, the church where the sinister canister containing Satan is being constrained is called Saint Godard's (as in revered French director Jean-Luc) and there's a character named Wyndham (after famed author John, who most memorably wrote the novel *The Day of the Triffids* as well as *The Midwich Cuckoos*, which Carpenter would film as the second version of *Village of the Damned* eight years later). The most up-front admission of debt appears in the opening credits, as the director's screenplay is attributed to "Martin Quatermass"—which, under the circumstances, serves as a protective balm against any claim of story thievery that a knowledgeable viewer might try to level at the film.

Carpenter is an expert at making people running around in dark hallways somehow feel like an appropriate symbolic reduction to represent the literal end of the world when the narrative begins tearing everything apart. As the tension ratchets up, it is palpable and exciting. But even with that, the film would benefit greatly by losing the baser trappings involving the scientists leaving the church to be attacked by homeless people (led by Alice Cooper), which feels more like unintentional comedy than horror. Cutting away from the claustrophobic tension of the interiors to the outside world dilutes much of the growing menace and distracts from the main focus; the Antarctic base in *The Thing* was an effective cage for those characters, and the isolation it represented created unresolved menace. There's a schizophrenic quality to *Prince*'s story structure that spends a good deal of time establishing the quantum-science aspects (many based on actual theories) and personal interactions—until it eventually devolves into a variation on


From a doctor to a president to a priest, Donald Pleasence remains a constant in John Carpenter's realm.

Photos: Copyright Universal

Are the combined forces of science (Victor Wong's Professor Birack) and religion enough to defeat the supernatural?

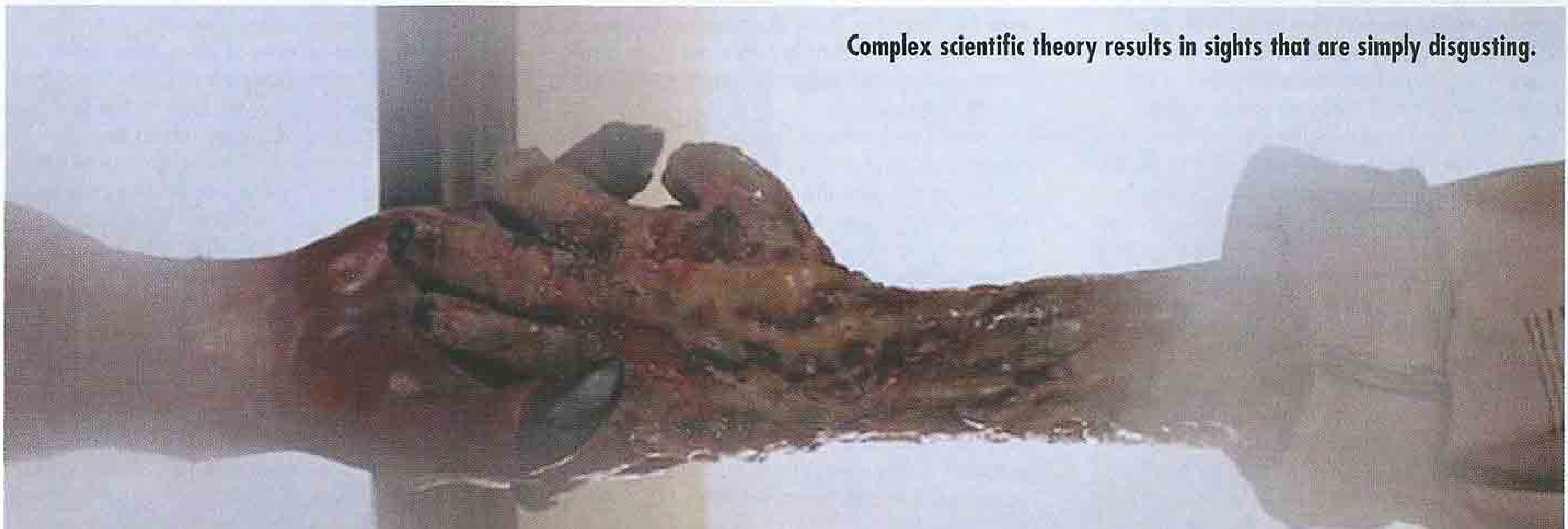
You know you're in trouble when Alice Cooper is lurking outside and things are even scarier inside.

the stalk-and-slash subgenre, with occasional breaks for scientific reflection when characters aren't being separated from each other to wander down those dark halls or seemingly abandoned alleyways.

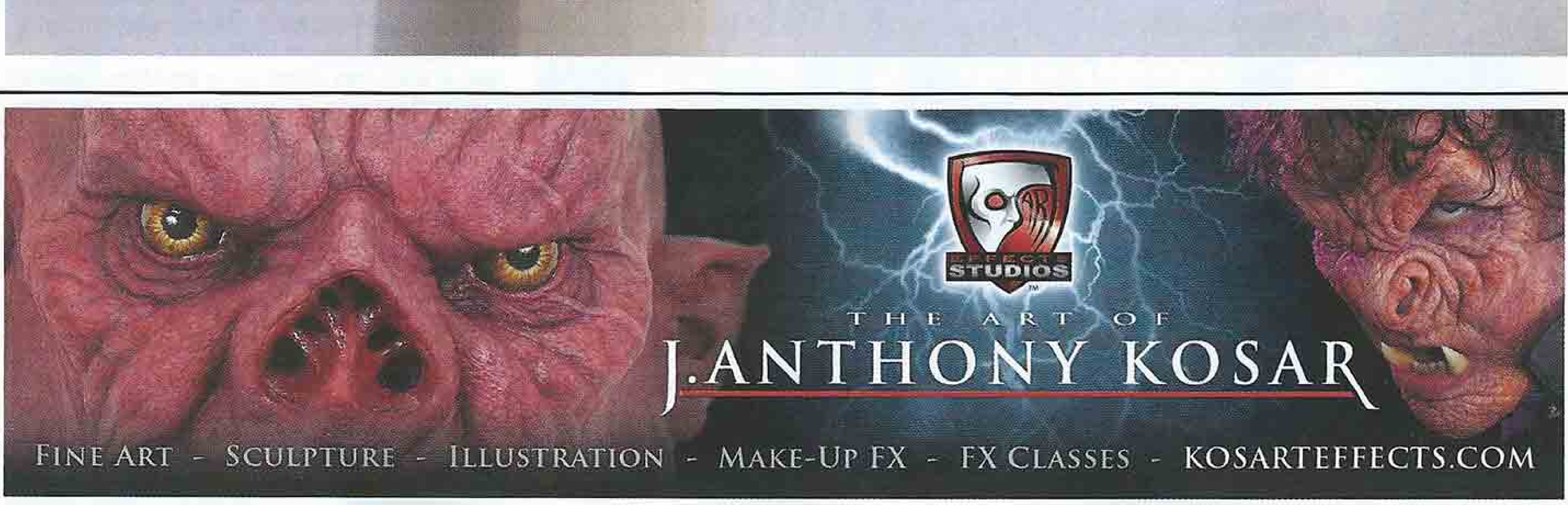
Another flaw in the storytelling that impacts upon the film's climax is that there is no discussion among the scientists about ancient metallurgy and folk tales that would give an explanation as to why Donald Pleasence's priest tossing a fire ax into a mirror would do so much damage to Satan. Here, Carpenter is probably overtly quoting *Quatermass and the Pit*, which established that the devil has a weakness against iron. In folklore, horseshoes are considered good luck because they're made out of that material; one well-known story relates how in 959 A.D., the Archbishop of Canterbury, a blacksmith by trade, nailed a horseshoe to one of the devil's hooves while in the midst of reshoeing Satan's horse. The Archbishop agreed to remove the horseshoe from the much-pained devil only if he promised never to enter a place that had an iron shoe hung over its doorway. Perhaps a scene discussing such concepts was shot and never used, or was deemed unnecessary to provide such a blunt explanation, but considering how many other anomalies of science are openly examined in *Prince*, it seems an odd absence of exposition that might make things clearer for the audience.

Maybe I'm being a bit too harsh on a movie that I want to match my expectations of what it's attempting to do—my initial disappointment with it for being a sci-fi film that ends up as a horror film is probably exactly what seasoned moviemaker Carpenter intended all along, so I cannot hold it against *Prince* for being something that it isn't. To its credit, the film's ideas still feel very fresh 25 years after the fact, and it does succeed on many weird and wonderful levels. Much like satanic liquid in a receptacle, the film continues to grow on me, and my admiration for it increases with each passing year. It's hard to think of another contemporary moviemaker who places enough trust in his audience to make a movie this smart and raises so many issues about beliefs that are thousands of years old and ingrained in the mass consciousness. *Prince of Darkness* remains a compelling classic on a number of levels, despite its flaws.

—Scooter McCrae



Complex scientific theory results in sights that are simply disgusting.



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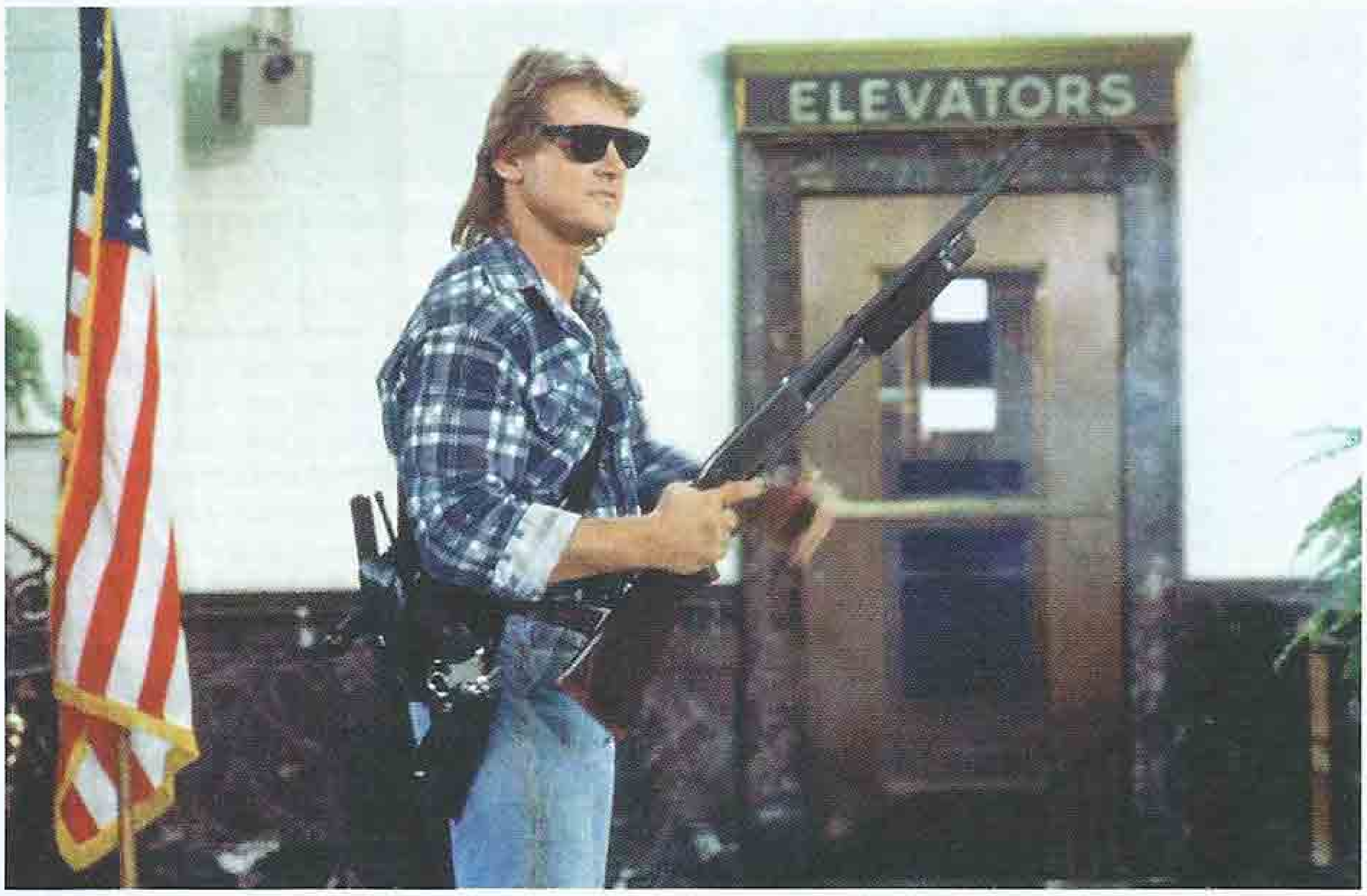
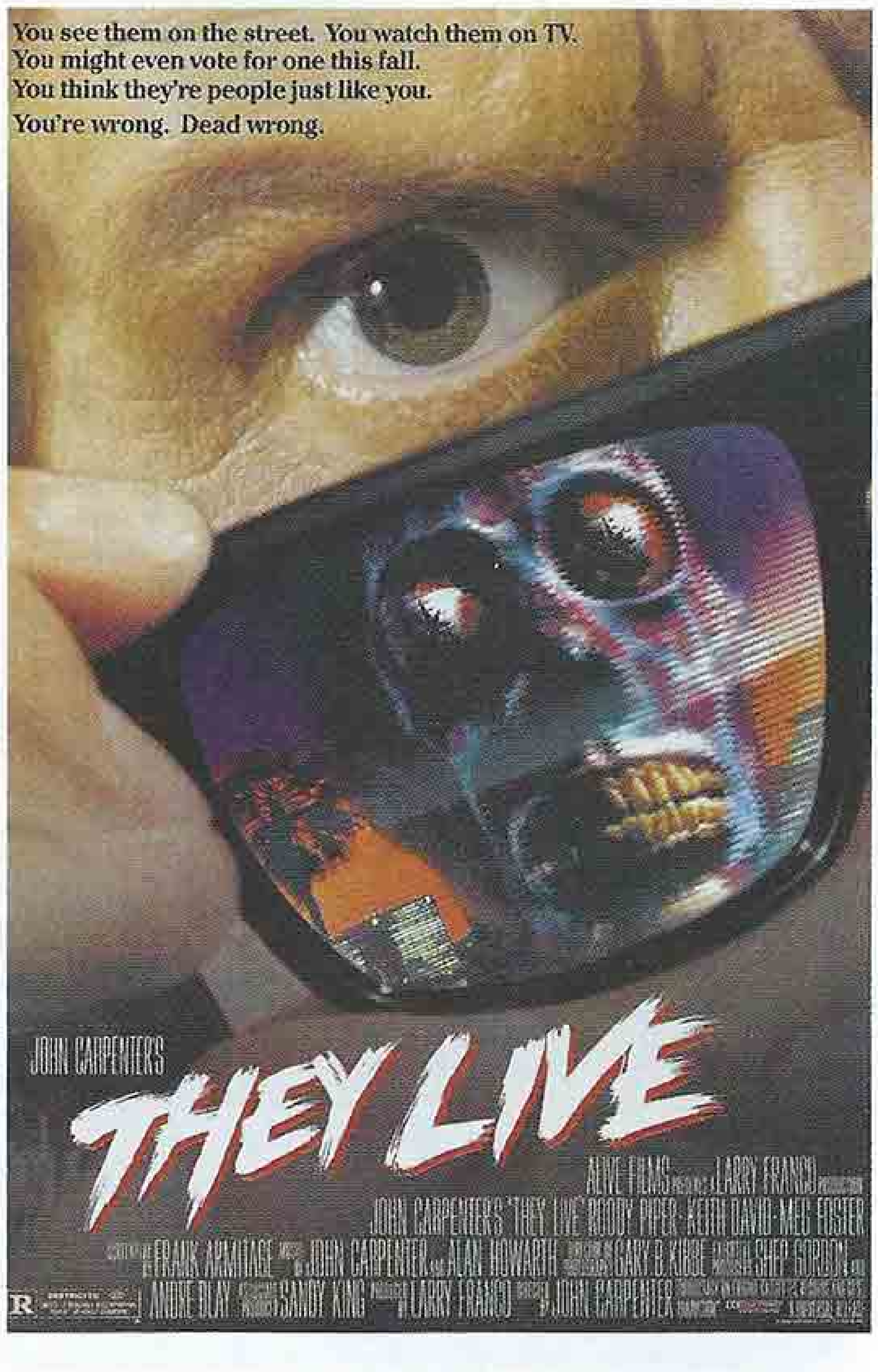
THEY LIVE

Alienating the masses



We never do see John Nada (Roddy Piper) chew bubblegum, but he sure kicks ass.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The second production in John Carpenter's sadly unfulfilled four-picture deal with Alive Films, *They Live* is a movie that continues to grow in stature as the years go by. A science fiction/action film laced with dark satire and a goofy sense of humor that prevents the picture from devolving into a self-important polemic, *They Live* is one of the director's most overtly entertaining films, and transcended the genre-viewer base to push itself into the mainstream consciousness. In fact, as recently as 2010, popular contemporary author Jonathan Lethem wrote an entire book critiquing the film, often making relevant points about its social significance and entertainment value (when not lacing his dissection with snide remarks).

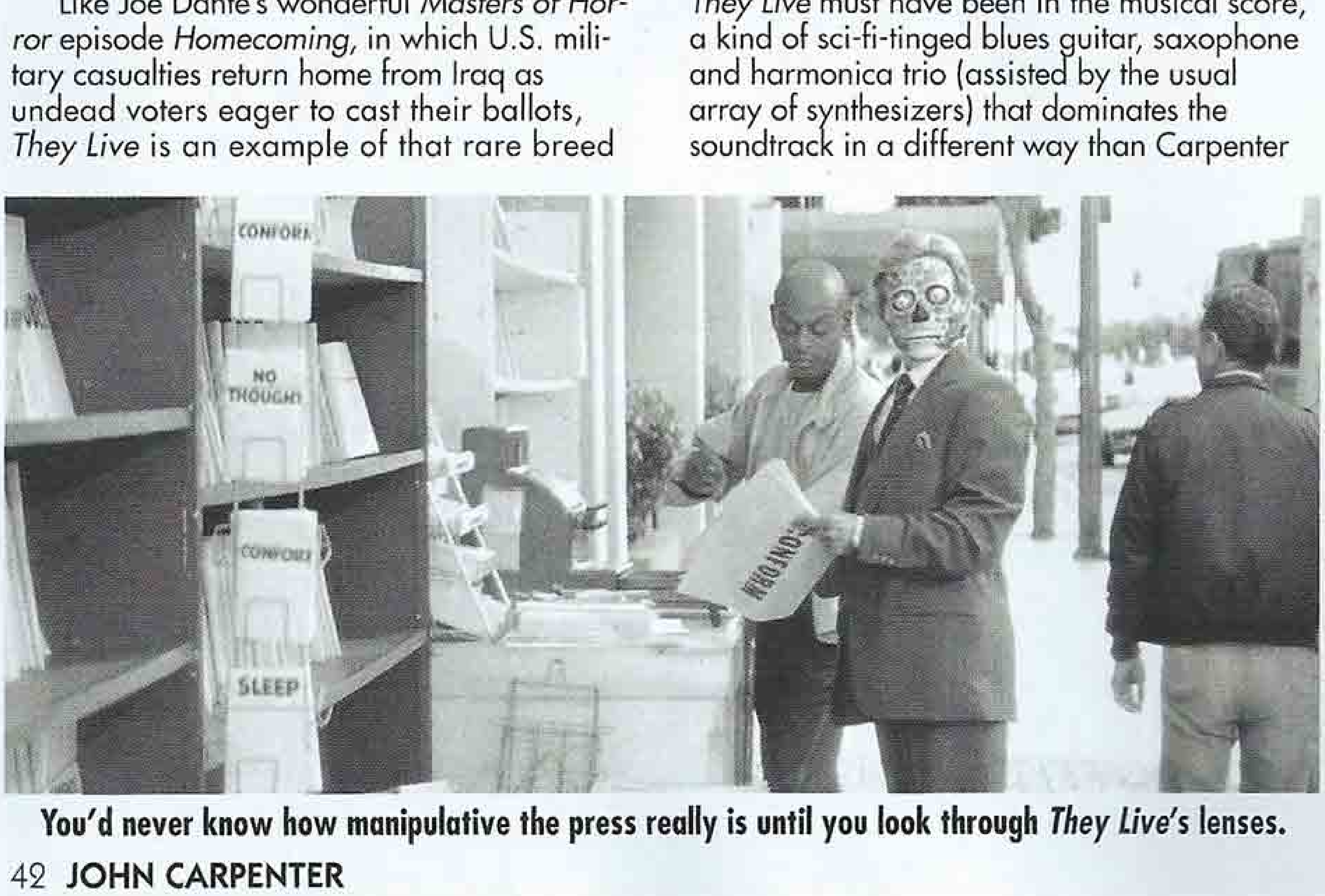
Like Joe Dante's wonderful *Masters of Horror* episode *Homecoming,* in which U.S. military casualties return home from Iraq as undead voters eager to cast their ballots, *They Live* is an example of that rare breed of brave moviemaking that examines what's happening in the world *right now* (or right then), and comments on it in an absurdist fashion. Why does it not seem surprising that it was the height of Bush doctrine and Reaganism, respectively, that brought out such trenchant commentary from these two great genre filmmakers?

They Live followed *Prince of Darkness* as a lower-budgeted project for Alive and distributor Universal, and the smaller financial risks of both ventures seem to have energized Carpenter, sending him back to the more personal and adventurous proclivities of his earlier features. It's as if Carpenter is at his creative best when he's working a little hungry. One can even get a sense of what an exciting change of pace *They Live* must have been in the musical score, a kind of sci-fi-tinged blues guitar, saxophone and harmonica trio (assisted by the usual array of synthesizers) that dominates the soundtrack in a different way than Carpenter and collaborator Alan Howarth had previously explored. Through the magic of still-nascent electronic music technology, the sampled sounds of the aforementioned simple instruments were manipulated via the Synclavier system to give them an otherworldly quality, letting the audience know up front that something is not quite right.

They Live is also Carpenter's most overtly Hitchcockian film, especially in the first half hour, as many scenes play without dialogue, consisting mainly of situations seen from the inquisitive point of view of blue-collar hero John Nada (Roddy Piper). It's classic storytelling: We see an incident, look to the protagonist's face for a reaction by which to judge what we are seeing and then continue to watch events unfolding with the perspective of that reaction. And thanks to Piper's solid and very appealing performance, we've got a fun character to hang out with and cheer for as our world is invaded by wealthy Republican aliens from outer space. The film seems as relevant as ever today, with a candidate like Mitt Romney having recently run for the Oval Office; Romney even looks and acts exactly like an upper-crust alien looking to outsource us as slave labor to the rest of the universe.

As with *Prince of Darkness,* Carpenter wrote *They Live*'s script under a pseudonym (Frank Armitage this time—a name borrowed from one of the characters in H.P. Lovecraft's "The Dunwich Horror"). The films have a lot in common, and reveal Carpenter's concerns about what was going on in the United States during this period of his career, exploring the roles of the Church and the homeless in our society—with very different outcomes in the two scenarios. Homelessness is a condition that affects even the hardest-working and most durable of Americans in *They Live,* whereas in *Darkness* they are a dirty and disheveled lot—schizophrenics used as murderous slave labor under mind control by the satanic force imprisoned within a malefic canister.

The Church, on the other hand, is an institution with which science has a much more complicated relationship than is usually pre-



You'd never know how manipulative the press really is until you look through *They Live*'s lenses.

sented in genre films. In *Prince*, the Church comes to the scientists and requests their help to examine and understand the indecipherable science of ancient texts, which contain such prescient notions as differential equations, etc., hundreds of years before they existed. In *They Live*, it is science that has taken refuge in a semi-abandoned church ostensibly serving the needs of the nearby shantytown—setting up a base for distribution of the alien-revealing sunglasses under the cover of a singing congregation that is no more than an audiotape playback system (again demonstrating technology being embraced rather than demonized within a religious setting). In Carpenter's vision, the Church is very much aware of what's really going on in the world, and capable of being a progressive force of protection against encroaching supernatural evil. It's a theme he continues (and upends) in *Vampires*, which could be considered the third film of a Carpenter "church trilogy."

Photos: Copyright Universal

Who hasn't seen something like this after a few drinks?

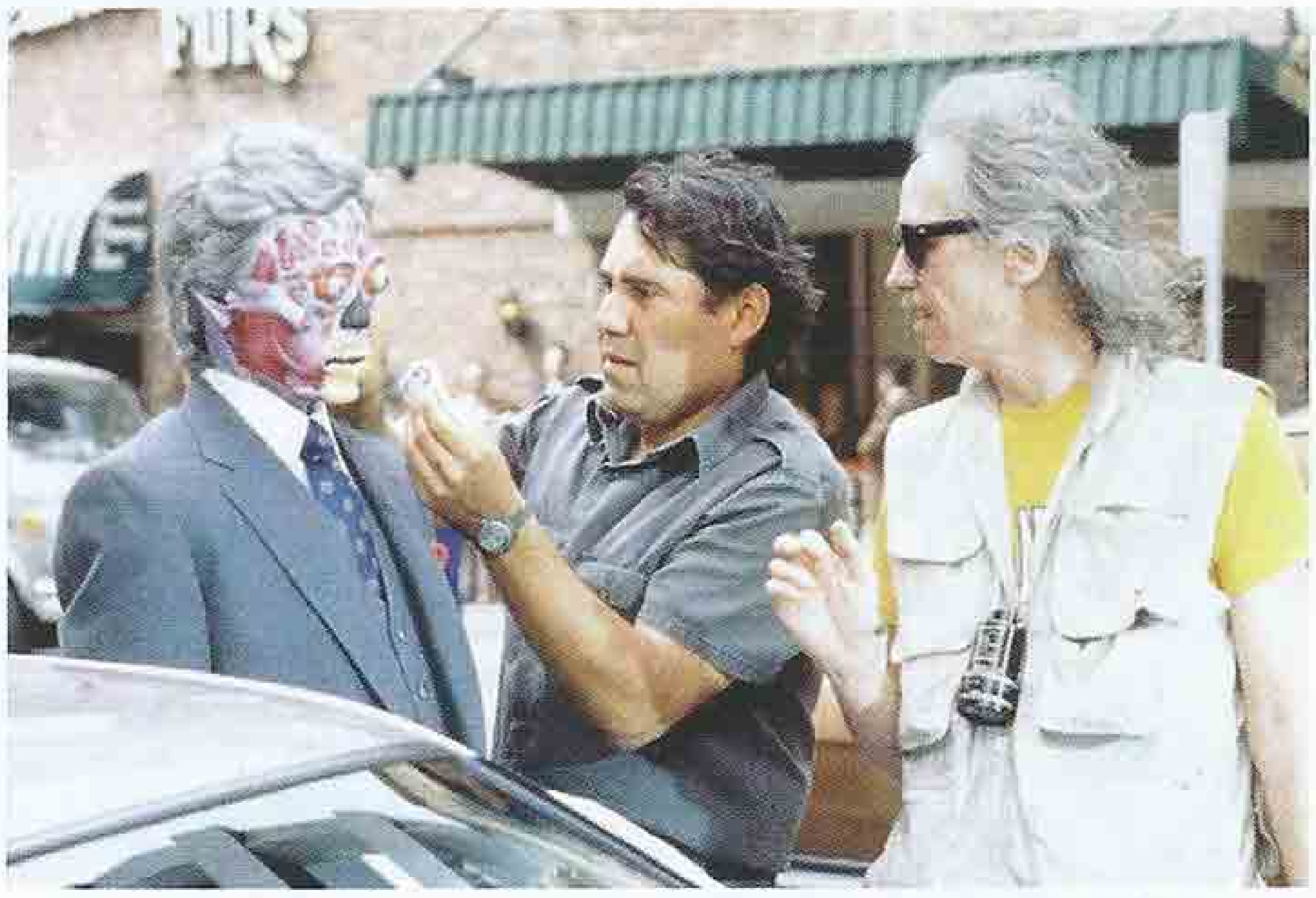
Both *Prince* and *They Live* also feature pirate video broadcasts originating from a church that are as tantalizing for their inability to be received for proper viewing as they are in content. In *Prince*, the tachyon-propelled traveling-backwards-in-time imagery enters the unconscious via the dreams of the sleeping scientists, whereas in *They Live*, it is a very direct and media-centric shout-out to the sleeping masses to awaken immediately and look at what is happening all around them. These completely different methods to achieve a similar result—awakening the sleeping mind—bring into focus the similarities and differences between the two films and provide an intriguing look into Carpenter's creative process as a dramatist who can juggle similar themes and come up with a pair of movies that are entirely different, tonally and thematically.

They Live's dark ending—though the overall effect of the climax is surprisingly optimistic for Carpenter—is offset by some pretty goofy comic moments, once again demonstrating his desire to make something thought-provoking but first and foremost entertaining. It's a lesson more self-important filmmakers with social consciences might consider taking to heart. Most directors would have treated this kind of material with an oppressive grimness and tiresome didacticism, but Carpenter knows it's much more entertaining to have a working-class yokel stumble across an extraterrestrial threat than a bunch of boring news reporters trying to save the world.

I'm not blind to the film's faults, but much of what I love about *They Live* can just as easily be listed as attributes, depending on who's keeping score. Can a film that aspires to be a keen critique of the social ills destroying what makes America great also contain one of filmdom's longest fistfights? Can people who read Noam Chomsky and folks who watch WWE wrestling sit next to each other and enjoy the same film from their different perspectives? All I know is that as someone who watches *Democracy Now* on a daily basis and also enjoys seeing a guy in tights take a folding chair to the back of the head once in a while, *They Live* is perfectly made to keep me entertained and enlightened no matter what mood I'm in, and I know I'm not the only one who feels that way. CONSUME. OBEY. PROCREATE.

—Scooter McCrae

It takes a long time for Nada and Frank (Keith David) to fight their way to common ground.


In the midst of the Reagan years, John Carpenter (right) and his collaborators put a new face on political paranoia.

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THE DEAN OF DARKNESS

With light and shadow, cinematographer Dean Cundey brought Carpenter's terrors to visual life.

By MICHAEL FELSHER

John Carpenter has consistently surrounded himself with a cadre of highly talented associates, both in front of and behind the camera, over the course of his career. One of his most celebrated collaborators was director of photography Dean Cundey, who first joined the director on *Halloween* and worked with him on a string of films over the next several years, including *The Fog*, *Escape from New York*, *The Thing* and *Big Trouble in Little China*.

For this special commemorative issue, Cundey reflects on his many films with the master of horror and details the challenges of creating the memorable sights seen (and often unseen) in their work together.

FANGORIA: Where were you in your career when you first met John Carpenter, and how did you come to collaborate on *Halloween*?

DEAN CUNDEY: Well, I had come out of UCLA's film school, and started working on non-union, low-budget movies, back in the days when they still had drive-in theaters and needed B-movies. I did about, I don't know, 12 or 14 of these little films; the script supervisor on a couple of 'em was Debra Hill, and she called me one day and asked if I was interested in meeting this guy John Carpenter. They were gonna make a horror film, and she thought he and I would make a good team. And I said, "Well, sure"; you know, who was I to pass up any film? So Debra introduced us and John and I had a nice conversation, and as a result, he invited me to join him on *Halloween*. That movie was a jumping-off point, obviously, for a lot of people.

> **"You can't just light [a creature] and expect the audience to believe the impossible. You always have to leave some mystery."**

FANG: This would also be the start of the unique visual style you two developed together. What were the challenges of shooting in the anamorphic film process, and why did you and he prefer to shoot that way?

CUNDEY: John had a real aesthetic sensibility about telling a story with the camera. That widescreen aspect ratio was one of those tools, and of course, it had been used for some time in epic films—Westerns and war movies and things like that, but nobody had really exploited it as a horror-genre aesthetic. John and I decided that it was perfect for that form, because it allowed for a lot of lurking space on the screen—you know, someone could fill part of a frame, and then behind them would be a lot of dark area where the bad guy could be. The idea was to include the characters in the environment and use the frame as part of the storytelling, and John was really good at that.

There had been screen stories of knife-wielding madmen before *Halloween* (with Jamie Lee Curtis), but rarely so artfully shot.

I loved the opportunity to use the camera that way. It's a matter of understanding what a particular scene needs as far as visual style, such as what areas of the frame should be continually dark, and lighting bits and pieces so the audience never feels they're not seeing stuff they should be seeing.

FANG: After *Halloween*, you and Carpenter next made *The Fog*. This was no doubt a very different experience for you in many ways, as the film is more visually expansive due to the extensive location work in Northern California. Also, the fog itself must have been difficult to film live on the set. What was your experience on this film like, compared to *Halloween*?

CUNDEY: Well, it was a great adventure, and one of the things I always appreciated about John was his awareness of the camera and of lighting and how it is used to tell the story. *The Fog* was a little different in that instead of it being scary and spooky all the time, there were moments that were supposed to be comfortable, so we made a lot of choices about lighting certain things more brightly—like when Adrienne Barbeau's character is up in the lighthouse, broadcasting during the daytime. It seems pleasant. The exteriors were all pleasant. It takes the audience down the path of why people want to live in this town, and how their lives are going to change when this evil fog and its inhabitants move in. We did visual effects we hadn't done before, and found ways to give the fog a personality, yet do it on a budget. Again, a lot of it was the fun of being limited by the money and therefore required to be creative and innovative, and that's one of the things I've enjoyed most about working with John.

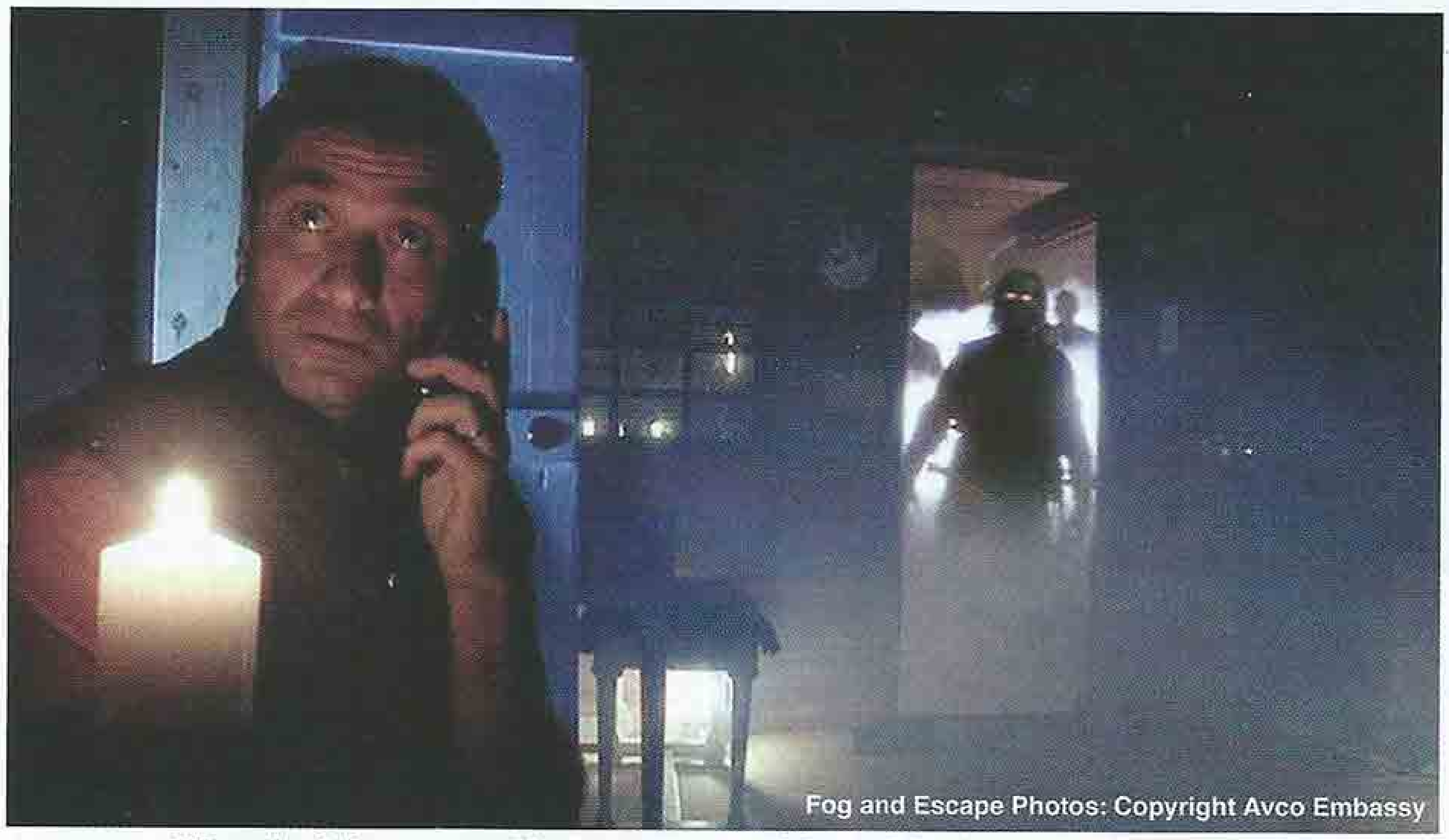
FANG: You and Carpenter then moved on to a project that represented a considerable departure from your horror endeavors: the action/sci-fi spectacle *Escape from New York*. That entailed a lot of optical FX, as well as dealing with the increased scale of a postapocalyptic urban wasteland.

CUNDEY: Each film with John was a new step. *Escape from New York*, when you read it, was incredibly intriguing, with its premise of turning Manhattan into a prison. The fact that we were going to have to create that world was a great challenge, and we had several new bits of equipment. The HMI light, which is now the industry standard, had just been developed, and we were able to use a few of those for our night exteriors. They have a really unique-looking blue hue. And Panavision, the camera company, had just developed a new, faster lens that enabled us to work with less light than before. So it was a case of having a couple of tools that led us down a path of innovation.

And then, of course, one of the great challenges was how to depict an empty Manhattan. We found an area of St. Louis that was being torn down and renovated, and the city was very cooperative in allowing us to take over about six square blocks

Thing Photos: Copyright Universal

For all the film's explicitness, what you didn't see of Rob Bottin's *The Thing* monstrosities was as important as what you did.



Fog and Escape Photos: Copyright Avco Embassy

When the lights go out, *The Fog*'s Captain Blake and his friends come knocking.

for our night exteriors. We were able to create a very desolate big-city look. The set-dressing guys would take two or three trucks full of junk they had found at the city dump, and go down the street just shoveling the stuff out. There would be a complete two- or three-block-long street just full of trash. So we would shoot, and then at the end of the night, we would say, "Thank you very much, tomorrow we're gonna be over on these streets," and during the day the crew would come in, load up the trucks, drive over to those streets and dump the stuff out again. It was always about how to set up all the stuff necessary to suck the audience into the action, and it was a great learning experience for all of us.

FANG: Although Carpenter didn't direct them, you continued your association with the franchise on *Halloween II* and *Halloween III: Season of the Witch*. What was your approach to these films, where you essentially picked up where you left off from the first *Halloween,* then segued into the stand-alone plot and characters of the third movie?

CUNDEY: When I heard they wanted to make *Halloween II*, I had actually been offered another project, but my feeling was that working on the original *Halloween* had really given me my start, so I had kind of an obligation to follow through. It was a case of trying to give it a contiguous style, but doing it with a different director who had his own vision—

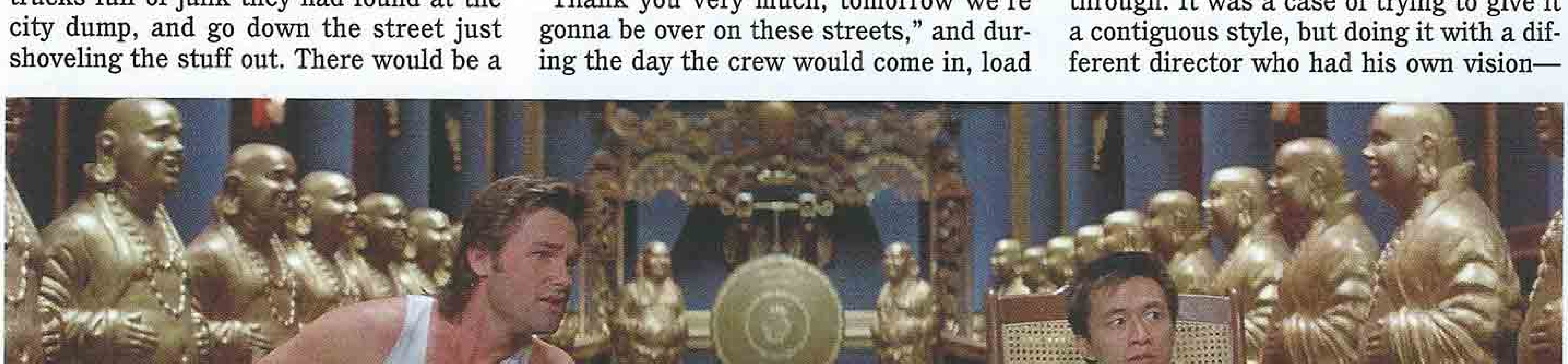


Photo: Copyright Fox

There were endless fantastical sights to light in *Big Trouble in Little China* (with Kurt Russell and Dennis Dun).

***The Fog* and its ghosts apparently come with their own source of illumination.**

The widescreen frame gave Michael Myers plenty of places to lurk.

The use of light and darkness emphasized the literal alienation developing between *The Thing*'s characters.

bringing continuity from the original to a movie being done by somebody else.

The third *Halloween* was a chance to do something completely different. There was no Michael, no continuous plotline, so I was able to do whatever I felt was essential for that storytelling. It was an interesting experience, because doing sequels can be restrictive in some ways. It's always about trying to find a way to tell that particular story properly, and put in your own contribution.

FANG: Now we come to *The Thing*, which many feel is one of the most strikingly photographed horror/sci-fi films of all time. You have the incredible, bright bleakness of the Antarctic setting juxtaposed with the claustrophobic darkness of the research-station interiors, on a combination of practical locations and studio sets that you managed to blend into a cohesive, chilling whole.

CUNDEY: Well, thank you very much! It is, of course, one of my favorite films, especially of those I've worked on with John. *The Thing* involved developing a sense of isolation for these guys down in the Antarctic, and then a feeling of warmth and safety inside, and then transforming that with shadows and lights going out and dark, lurking corners. The conditions under which we filmed in Stewart, British Columbia—the snow and wet and freezing cold and all that—you don't necessarily see on the screen. It was a true hardship for the crew. You always try to convert that to the screen; you want whatever it is you're feeling to end up in the movie. The lighting, camera angles, color and composition are all part of getting the audience to feel what it is you're experiencing yourself.

FANG: Rob Bottin's incredible creatures and special makeup FX have been celebrated for years as some of the best ever committed to film, and rightfully so. However, without the correct lighting and framing, a big rubber monster looks like a big rubber monster, no matter how well-designed it is. A good deal of the overall effect is dependent on the cinematographer knowing how to light and shoot it.

CUNDEY: Rob is an incredibly creative guy—a sculptor, an innovator of creatures and so forth. He and I were very cognizant of the fact that you can't just light something, put it out there and expect the audience to believe the impossible. You have to leave some mystery, so lighting Rob's stuff was always an intricate process. We looked for textures and shapes, and then found ways to keep other parts of it dark so we were directing the audience's attention to what we specifically wanted. Rob was on the set, and he would be very helpful, saying, "You know, I have a seam that runs right through this area here; we don't want to see that." So I would say, "OK, that has to be dark, so the light will have to come from there." We'd find little ways to give the audience the impression of the gruesomeness or strangeness, and yet not show them everything.

It's like magic. When I was a kid, I was always interested in magic and performing. I became aware very quickly of the fact that it's all misdirection—getting the audience to watch just what you want 'em to watch while you're doing something else on the side. I believe that translates to film. You know, we are all illusionists; we're getting the audience to believe they're actually watching something happen, whether it's just people talking in a romantic comedy or the extreme opposite in science fiction and action. You're taking the audience somewhere they can't go in real life but getting them to believe that they're there, and Rob Bottin's creatures were part of that.

FANG: After *The Thing*, you and Carpenter went in different directions for a little while, but you reteamed one last time for one of his more outlandish movies, *Big Trouble in Little China*. How did you two reunite for this project, and how did you tackle the film's unusual blend of Asian action, sci-fi and fantasy?

CUNDEY: Well, as far as not teaming up with John for a while, it was almost as if we *had* been continuously working togeth-

The sets were trashed intentionally for *Escape from New York* (with Russell).

er, because we knew each other's styles and sense of humor. I understood what he was looking for in a particular shot, and that kind of shorthand always makes the working environment not only easier but more fruitful, because you don't have to concentrate so much on the language or syntax of what you're trying to accomplish. It was a delight to work with him again, and on a big studio movie. We built huge sets, and created action and special effects and all that to enhance an improbable world.

It's an out-of-time, out-of-place action-adventure, and it was a lot of fun to start in a world that seems logical and reasonable, such as Chinatown, and meet the people and create realistic lighting and so forth, and then descend, literally, into a fantastical world of strange characters and kung fu. John was ahead of his time in wanting to showcase Asian martial arts in an American film. It was a lot of fun to do that.

FANG: After *Big Trouble*, you went on to an amazing run of movies, including the *Back to the Future* series and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* with Robert Zemeckis and Steven Spielberg's *Hook* and *Jurassic Park*. Carpenter went on to other successes, in both the independent and studio arenas. Was there ever a time when you and he came close to getting together again, or have your paths never really crossed since?

CUNDEY: Well, it's interesting. I know that when they did *Escape from L.A.*, Kurt Russell was part of the producing team and said to John, "Why don't we get all of the old crew together from *Escape from New York* to make this movie?" But it didn't happen, because we were all doing different things, so they made *Escape from L.A.* without the original team. Since then, John had established relationships with a new group, and you tend to stay with those people.

> **"Widescreen had been used for some time in epic films...but nobody had really exploited it as a horror-genre aesthetic."**

FANG: When you recall your collaborations with Carpenter, what do you think has been the most important effect of your relationship, and the enduring popularity of the films you did together?

CUNDEY: I look back very fondly and proudly on those projects. I think we were all playing above our game. It opened doors for me, I know that. For instance, Bob Zemeckis, when he invited me to join him for the first time on *Romancing the Stone*, he and Michael Douglas cited *Escape from New York* as something they were very interested in.

John was the first director I had worked with at that time who really wanted to use the camera as a storytelling device, and he gave me an opportunity to demonstrate that I could do that, too. It was, for both of us, a great symbiotic relationship. We both had things we wanted to do and ways to tell stories, and it happened to coincide that we did them together.

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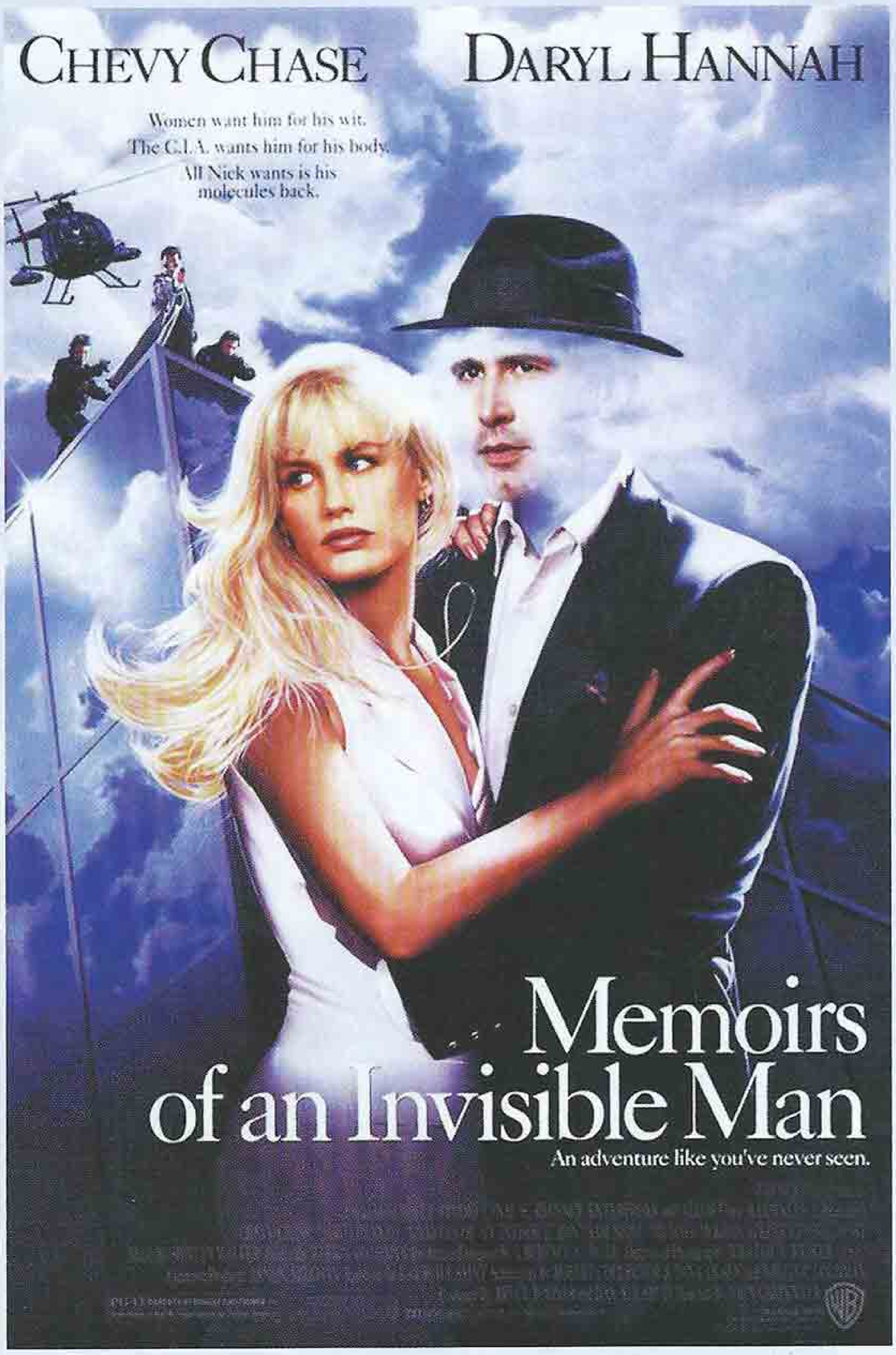

CHEVY CHASE
DARYL HANNAH
Women want him for his wit.
The C.I.A. wants him for his body.
All Nick wants is his molecules back.
Memoirs of an Invisible Man
An adventure like you've never seen.

Chevy Chase's disappearing act

Memoirs of an Invisible Man seems to have been disregarded in John Carpenter's filmography as an indistinct trifle, produced in the gap between *They Live* and his prolific period in the mid-to-late '90s. It's largely remembered as Chevy Chase's failed attempt to sell himself as a non-comedic leading man, and the troubled production bore all the signs of a misguided vanity project. It's an experience Carpenter himself might be relieved to forget, but rewatching *Memoirs* today reveals it to have more in common with his other work than its reputation would suggest.

Carpenter is such a superb craftsman that *Memoirs'* slickness seems effortless, allowing him room to color in the edges with personal trademarks: distrust of the government, championship of iconoclasts and loners and the offbeat skewing of action formula that defined *Big Trouble in Little China*. Make no mistake, this is a generally uninspired high-concept comic thriller, but thanks to Carpenter's skill it bears no signs of a problem picture—only the kinds of formulaic plot devices and logical leaps that Hollywood regularly challenges audiences to accept. *Memoirs* is a straight-up popcorn flick, a PG-13 potboiler full of action setpieces and special FX, and had it succeeded financially, Carpenter could have easily crossed over to studio tentpole releases.

Speaking of which, *Memoirs* marked another step forward for Industrial Light & Magic, coming a year after *Terminator 2*. While many of the invisibility gags were done with in-camera tricks, a dizzying array of techniques were employed by ILM's Bruce Nicholson and his team to create illusions of Chase chewing gum, smoking and creating a disembodied face with makeup. The most breathtaking image is Chase in the rain, the droplets outlining his transparent body. As in Paul Verhoeven's *Hollow Man*, another disappointing modern invisibility movie by an adored genre director, the extraordinary FX dominate a curiously misguided narrative.

Memoirs' plot hinges on the luck of Chase's Nick, a wishy-washy compromise between ne'er-do-well and genuine good guy. He falls for Daryl Hannah's gentle-yet-forward Alice upon their first meeting, then the next day coincidentally takes a nap in a building that is rendered invisible by a lab accident (events so loosely adapted from H.F. Saint's novel, the credits should read "inspired by"). Nick's invisibility invites the interest of shady government agents, led by David Jenkins (Sam Neill), and at this point the movie starts to feel more like classic Carpenter. Swarming CIA footsoldiers are accompanied by lens flares and spectacular night photography by the late William A. Fraker, the excellent cinematographer of *Bullitt* and *Rosemary's Baby*.

Once the invisibility and antagonists are established, the increasingly unsteady story benefits from Carpenter's gifts. The movie feels brisk even when the entire second act consists of Nick secretly staying at a friend's vacation house, and there's a perfect moment of suspense when Jenkins works late at his office and suddenly suspects he's not alone. Carpenter's talent for casting pays off with Neill, whose charming, sinister performance is terrific even though the character himself is strictly boilerplate. Likewise, Alice does nothing interesting as written, but comes across as bright and perceptive in execution.

One of Carpenter's stranger and more effective directorial choices is letting Nick occasionally be visible to the audience while unseen by the other characters. The humor would be impossible to intuit otherwise, as when Nick puts extra force into Alice shutting a door on an aggressive would-be suitor. The best example is when Nick is almost discovered in the guest house by his friends, including George (Michael McKean), who opens the door to a completely naked Chase—and while they ignore him, the audience gets to share the joke.

What fails is *Memoirs'* lazy screenplay, full of placeholders for better ideas that never arrive; oddly enough, its most maligned aspect is hardly the problem in hindsight. Though his personal reputation has since curdled, and the film's box-office failure fast-tracked his fall from public favor, Chase is actually good in the film. He's more than credible as a leading man, handsome and playful in the Cary Grant mold, and when the movie works at all, it's usually due to the surprising amount of intelligence and vulnerability Chase brings to his part. For a man often accused of sleepwalking through roles, Chase takes this story seriously, and his few purely comic bits (the voice he uses in the cab, his disbelief at a potential thief, even a moment that sees him puppeteering his own jacket to appear to weep) are in character. His chemistry with Hannah is especially strong, and when the script establishes Nick's primary goal as disappearing with the girl and a lot of cash, it's the character that betrays Chase. Nick's actions grow petulant and selfish, but Chase's performance stays warm and sincere.

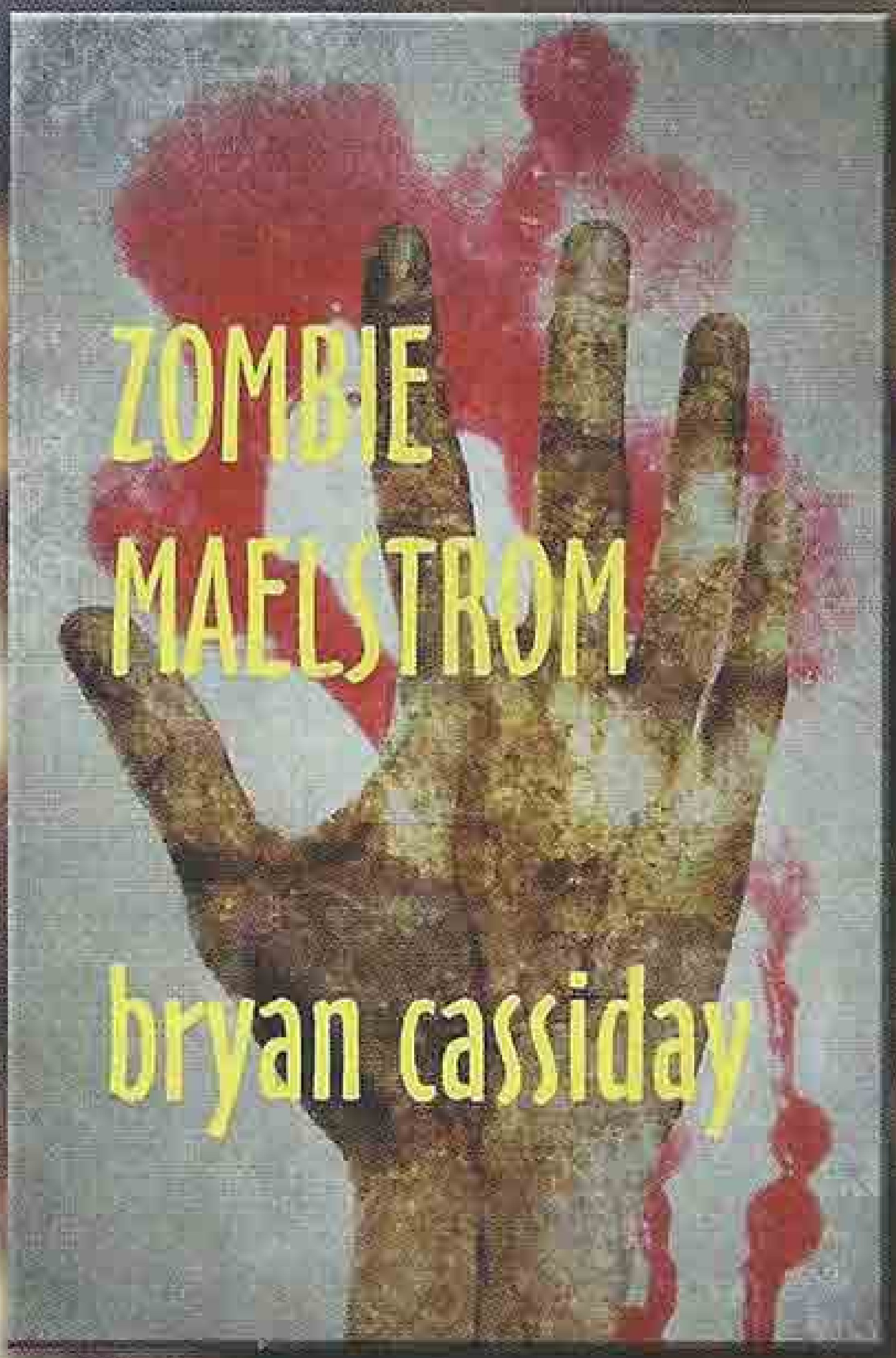
The movie's ultimate failure may have derived from an overabundance of that sincerity. Nick's invisibility is a straight-up curse, and while his restraint is admirable (pains are taken to show his lone Peeping Tom moment as circumstantial), the wish-fulfillment potential is completely drained from the premise. This was apparently at Chase's insistence; according to William Goldman's book *Which Lie Did I Tell?*, original *Memoirs* director Ivan Reitman envisioned a high-concept, FX-heavy comedy *à la Ghostbusters* with Chase in the lead. Goldman had been hired to pen the script, and he bristled at the star's insistence that the movie be "an investigation of the loneliness of invisibility." Whether Chase's agenda represented dedication to the story aspects that interested him the most or a calculated break into more serious parts, his insistence on de-emphasizing the comedy carried through to Carpenter's movie. Goldman's dismissal of Chase as a "clown" unsuited to exploring such themes was subsequently echoed by critics of the eventual film.

The irony is that no one could accuse *Memoirs* of being serious (this isn't Chase's *The Razor's Edge* by a longshot), and Chase's performance does succeed, indicating new directions his career could have taken. It was when audiences didn't see their expectations met, or the entertainment value in having them defied, that the film failed, and Chase's career eventually declined.

So where does *Memoirs* fit into Carpenter's legacy? It's an odd viewing experience for fans, seeing his style applied to rainy-day matinee fare, and a toss-up for least essential Carpenter viewing with *Village of the Damned*. Given the choice, it seems strange to favor *Memoirs* on the basis of it not being all that bad, but...it really isn't all that bad.

HELL IS TOO CROWDED

"Cassiday blends thoughtful suspense and pulse-pounding terror to deliver a novel with both bite and creeping dread."
--David Dunwoody on Sanctuary in Steel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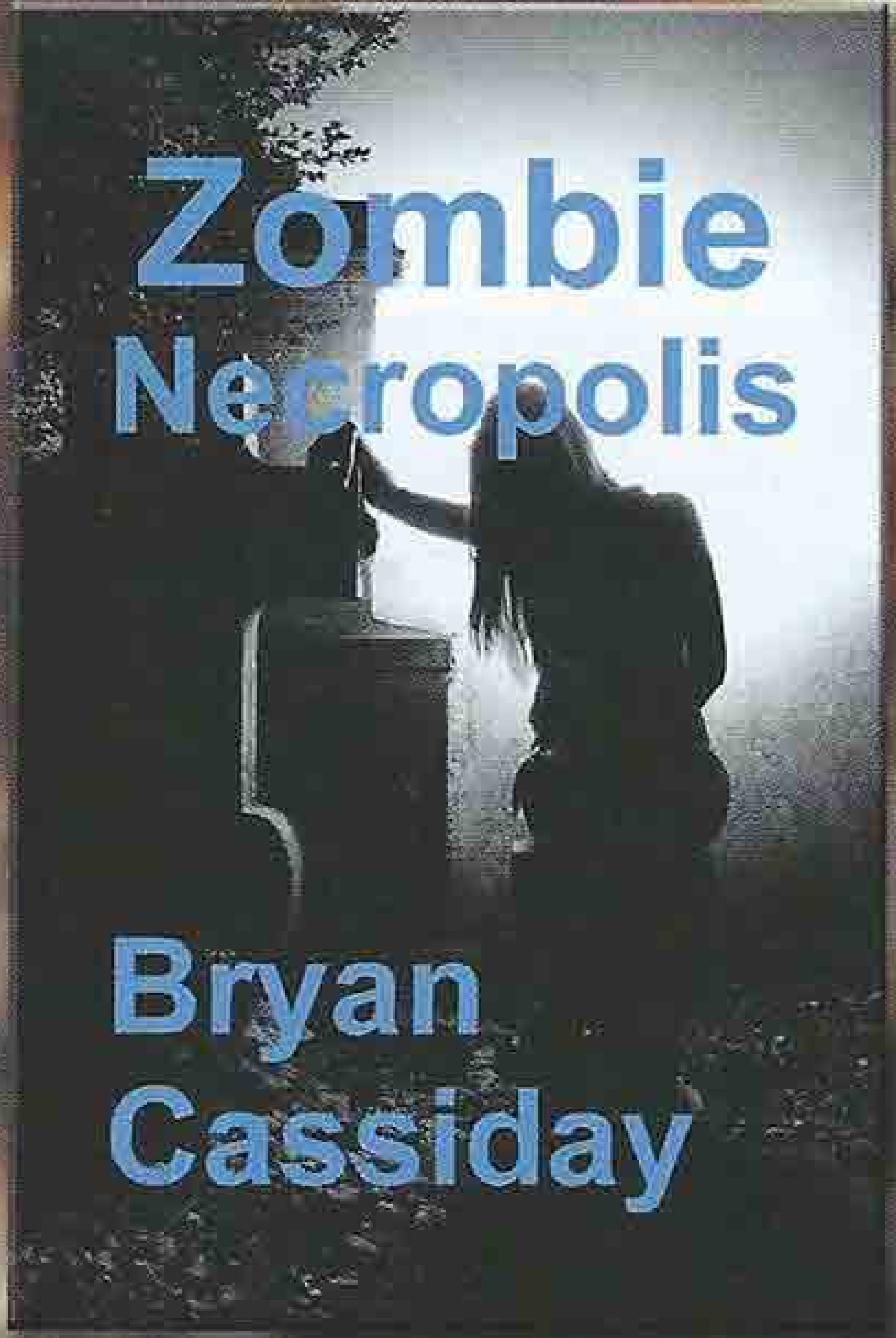
MAELSTROM
bryan cassiday


Zombie
Necropolis
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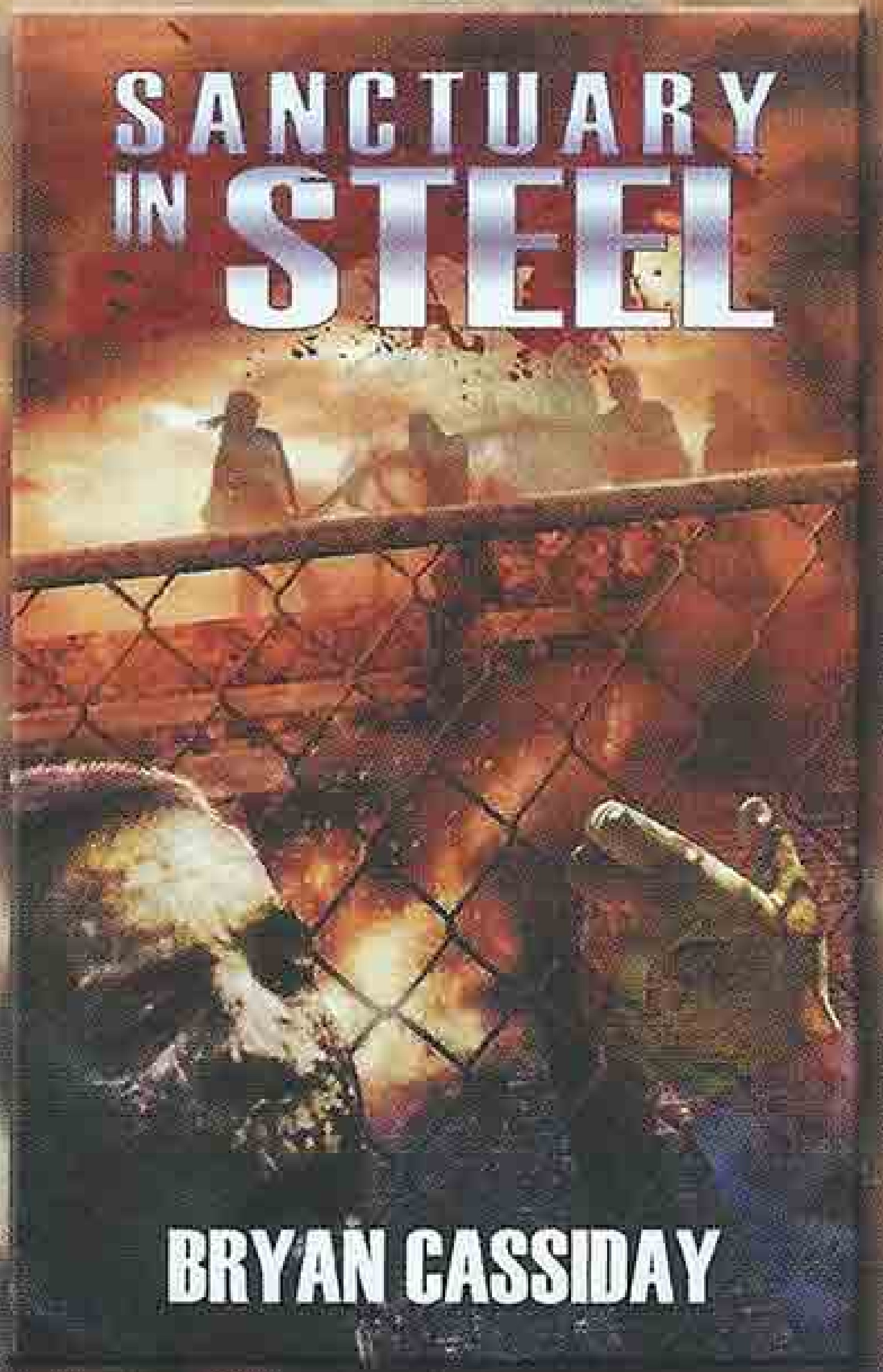
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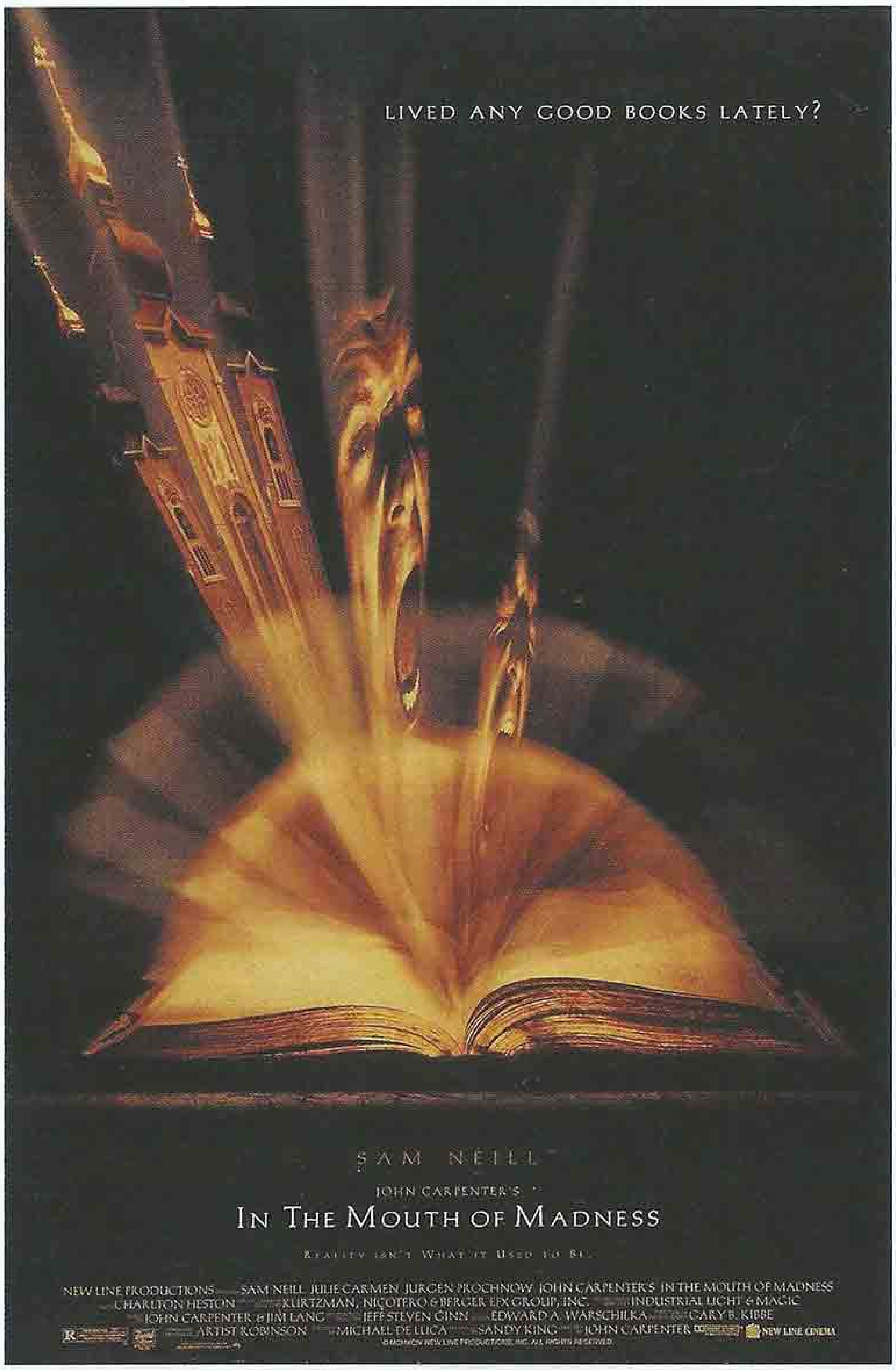
IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

Opening up Lovecraftian evil

The third installment in what John Carpenter calls his "apocalypse trilogy" (following *The Thing* and *Prince of Darkness*) is the twisted *In the Mouth of Madness*. And although critics largely gave *Madness* negative reviews upon its initial release in 1995, the film—like much of Carpenter's best work—has gained a significant cult following and the respect of horror fans over time. As well it should have—this flick is downright chilling.


LIVED ANY GOOD BOOKS LATELY?
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NEW LINE CINEMA

Sam Neill (*Possession*, *Jurassic Park*) stars as John Trent, an insurance investigator hired by a publisher to locate famous horror novelist Sutter Cane (Jurgen Prochnow), who has disappeared days before his latest book is set for release. Trent has been tasked with finding out whether Cane is dead or alive, and also to recover the manuscript of that new work. Knowing little about the elusive author, Trent begins reading Cane's novels and, amidst plenty of hallucinations, discovers that Hobb's End, the setting of Cane's stories, actually exists. As Trent explores the town searching for the author, he soon realizes Hobb's End is even stranger—and more terrifying—than fiction.

The movie, as the title of Michael De Luca's script suggests, channels quite a bit of Lovecraftian lore, borrowing heavily from such tormented tales as "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" and "At the Mountains of Madness." Though the film is not directly derived from any specific Lovecraft work, it combines the characters and mythos from a number of the eldritch author's tales in its nightmarish New England hamlet. And true to those roots, *Madness* takes great pleasure in twisting reality and distorting time and space. The viewer is given no narrative insight outside of Trent's own perceptions, making the plot sometimes hard to follow—but that's the point. Regardless of your tastes in more abstract horror, one thing is inarguable: Those people with the double eyes are damn freaky.

Though it features the requisite number of shock moments, *Madness* takes the terror a step further, drifting deep into psychological unease. It posits larger questions like "How do we personalize fear?" and "How do we create our own realities and write our own destinies?" This is pretty heady stuff—especially considering this hit theaters around the same time as *The Jerky Boys* and *Billy Madison*—and it has aged remarkably well.

Oddly enough, masked by all this terror is a strange vein of winking comedy, which of course is a Carpenter signature. The act of balancing deliciously dark subject matter with a subversively humorous approach is equally present in *They Live*, *Big Trouble in Little China* and even to an extent in *Halloween*. *Madness* relies greatly on Neill's straight-faced, wide-eyed performance as a source of that humor; his dogged fight to maintain his own sanity while the world unravels around him becomes equally compelling and hilarious.

Madness also exemplifies Carpenter's skills in its beautiful visual compositions. Shooting in his traditional widescreen, the director makes insanity and the ensuing apocalypse alluring and fascinating. Filmed in Ontario, Canada, *Madness* utilized the town of Markham's Cathedral of the Transfiguration as its black church, and in concert with cinematographer Gary P. Kibbe, Carpenter skillfully makes the Catholic house of worship seem overwhelmingly sinister.

Indeed, it feels like a deeper message about religion is at work amidst the movie's chaos and depravity. *Madness* takes stabs at religion as it presents a society that is completely changing its shape and values based solely on the text of a book. Surely, positing a church as Sutter Cane's central setting was no accident. The film hypothesizes a world where people are mindlessly driven by the printed word, intrinsically changed and forced to follow its rules without question simply because it has been written that way. Focusing on the negative results of reading too much horror literature at first makes *Madness* seem like it's taking a dig at the obsessiveness of genre fans, but considering the pointed humor and wit that suffuses the film, *Madness* is clearly laughing at the same time, making self-aware commentary on the silly notion that mass consumption of scary media could ever result in horrific actions. It is, after all, only a movie.

—Rebekah McKendry

Photo: Copyright New Line

John Trent (Sam Neill) doesn't have to speak of his fear—it's written all over his face.

VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED

Midwich-level achievement

Photo: Copyright Universal

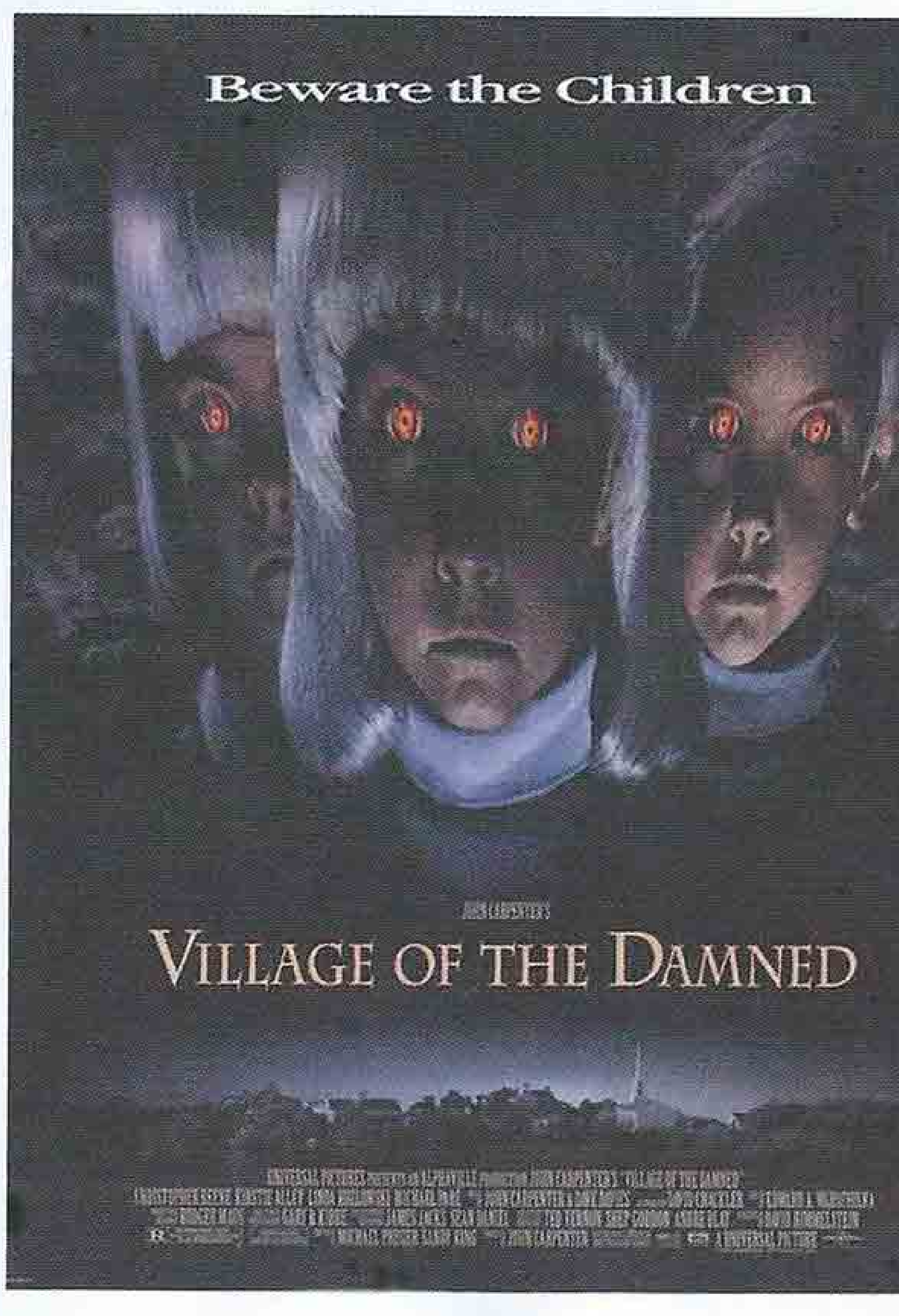
Mara (Lindsey Haun) leads the especially bright-eyed children of the *Village of the Damned*.

When yours was the name on the slate for what turned out to be modern horror's finest remake, your second go at restaging a familiar tale is going to be held up to a seriously stringent standard. This was the case with John Carpenter's update of Wolf Rilla's 1960 classic *Village of the Damned*—and certainly, when placed beside the moody original, his version comes up paler than the hair of his flick's devious alien brood. *Village* is lower-rung Carpenter, to be sure, but consider the larger picture: It is in the director's more disposable output that he elevates himself above his peers.

Both he and the other vaunted masters of horror have had their triumphs, their golden hours, their undeniable bastions of greatness. But it's amidst these filmmakers' shabbier, uncelebrated outings that Carpenter is distinguished—by his unerring instinct to entertain, to avoid artsy indulgences and move the proceedings along at a smart clip, even when failing to produce something particularly memorable. In no way absorbing or scary, the 1995 *Village* still stands as an agreeable avenue for breezing away a Saturday afternoon. Faint praise, perhaps, but how many of Carpenter's contemporaries in the genre only wish their weakest efforts could be described as such?

Village begins with the tiny burg of Midwich experiencing a "blackout": a mysterious mass event in which the residents all lose consciousness in a single instant. Once everyone recovers, aw-shucks country doctor Alan Chaffee (Christopher Reeve) is left at a loss when he finds that a group of women, including his own wife, have inexplicably become pregnant. When the children of the blackout are eventually born, they exhibit a sinister hive mentality and psychic bond, as well as an affinity for soot-grey cardigans and jumpers. Along with their sartorial similarities, the little hatchlings also wield the ability to telepathically manipulate adults into harming themselves and others. Dr. Chaffee, with help from a secretive government scientist (Kirstie Alley), must oppose his own daughter and uncover the kids' agenda before they lay waste to what they increasingly consider to be an inferior species.

Based, like Rilla's film, on John Wyndham's novel *The Midwich Cuckoos* and scripted by David Himmelstein, *Village* never sits idle or bores under Carpenter's direction. He conquers the trickiest aspect of a movie of this nature, namely wrangling decently threatening performances out of his child actors when missteps could have easily backfired into unintentional comedy (revisit the overrated *Children of the Corn* for a prime, hilarious example of this phenomenon). The little actresses who portray Chaffee's daughter Mara, both as a toddler (Hillary Harvey) and at school age (Lindsey Haun), transmit a cruel and haughty absence of emotion that's ideal for the character, and a tiny Thomas Dekker, who would grow up to topline *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and Robert Hall's ChromeSkull flicks, gives a prodigious performance as David, the single sympathetic in the ranks of the unearthly children.



As for the grownups, star Reeve (with whom Carpenter reportedly clashed mightily during filming) has the "decent man under duress" down pat. Carpenter regular Peter Jason (*Prince of Darkness, They Live*) pops up just to encounter yet another messy demise (does the guy owe the director money or something?), while Mark Hamill has a small role as a twitchy, befuddled clergyman who realizes too late that not all virgin births are miracles. And sharpen your eyeballs to catch a ponytailed Carpenter himself (billed as "Rip Haight") making one of his Hitchcockian cameos as "Man at Gas Station Phone."

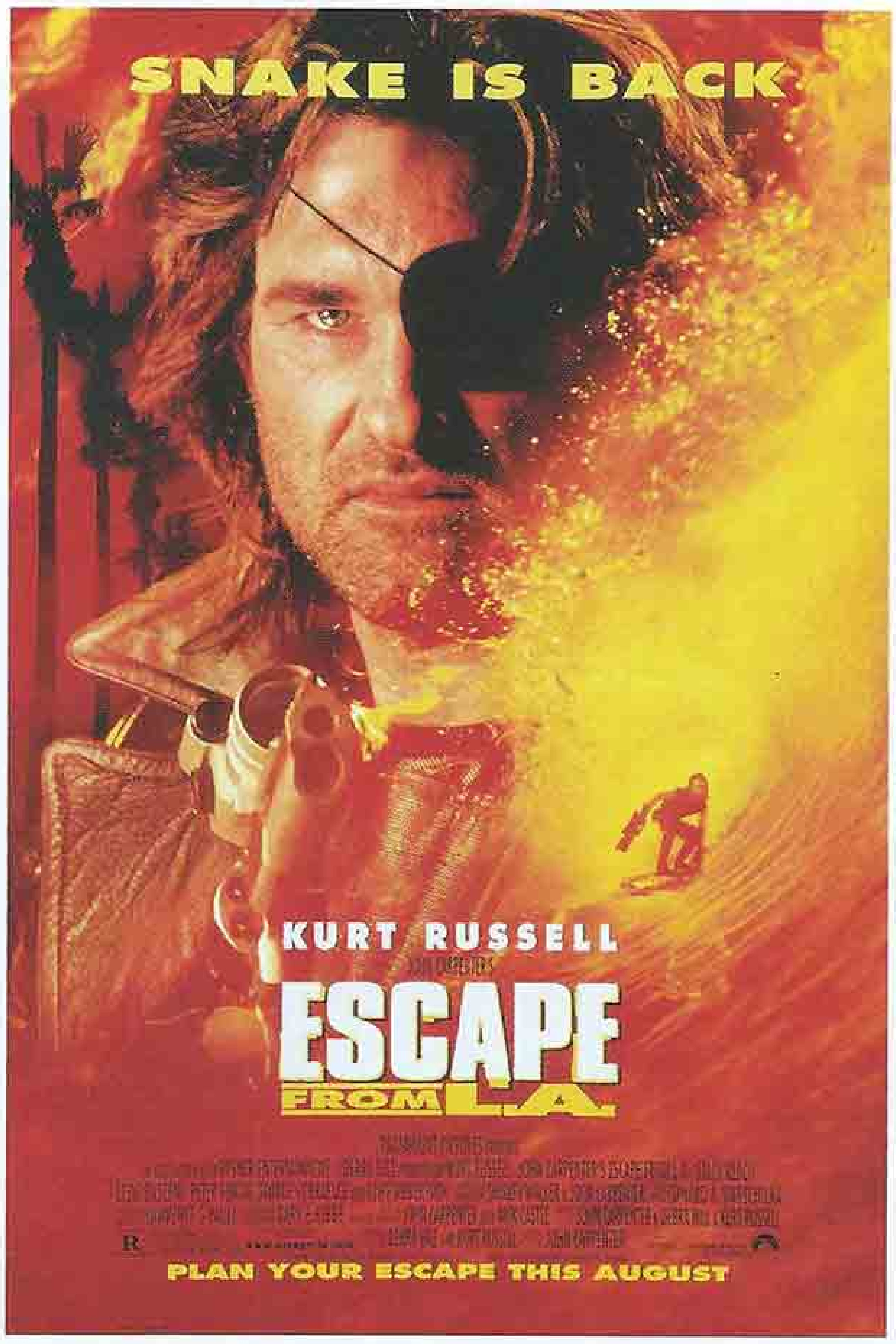
Playing light on blood, Carpenter does manage a few nasty, juicy moments: a man accidentally barbecuing himself into a husk of ash during the blackout, and the kids puppeteering the school janitor into not only leaping to his death from a roof, but impaling himself upon landing by having him hold his trusty broom at a perpendicular angle on the way down. There's also a quick, budget-draining action setpiece as well: a brief shootout in which Midwich's cops are manipulated into waging war against National Guard troopers.

OK, OK: This *Village of the Damned* surely isn't destined for enshrinement in anybody's time capsule, but it moves with purpose, does deliver the odd chill and, most importantly, doesn't embarrass itself or its esteemed auteur. If that verdict is ever in doubt, here's the cure: put this *Village* on a double bill with *Cursed*...or *Bruiser*...or *Mortuary*...or *Giallo*...

—Trevor Parker

ESCAPE FROM L.A.

Snake goes left coast



Like so many of the miscreants populating the postapocalyptic penitentiary of Manhattan, moviegoers could have been forgiven for thinking Snake Plissken was dead. It was a 15-year layoff before Snake would grace the big screen for his second (and, as of now, final) bow in 1996's *Escape from L.A.*, a project which marked a reunion between John Carpenter, producing powerhouse Debra Hill and star Kurt Russell, who was thrilled to have the chance to clap on Snake's leathers again and reprise what he has declared on numerous occasions to be his career-favorite role.

Opening with a punchier update of Carpenter's *Escape* theme music, we enter a 2013 in which a segment of the California coast has been shorn loose of the continent by a massive earthquake. Our holy-rolling president (Cliff Robertson) has declared the fate of now-waterbound Los Angeles to be a "punishment from God," and deports all his undesirables (crimes of the day include atheism and the consumption of red meat) to a lifetime of exile on the island. Having fallen under the control of thug revolutionary Cuervo Jones (George Corraface), the daughter of said prez has recently gone rogue and defected to LA with a secret superweapon in tow. Rescue plans A to Y all having failed, jackbooted authorities capture crotchety cyclopean Snake, infect him with a time-release killer virus and once again hold his life as the ransom for undertaking another suicidal infiltration: Snake is to move through the lawless, lethal tribes that now inhabit the cursed ruins of Los Angeles, retrieve the superweapon and feed either knuckles or bullets to anyone standing in his way.

Watching *Escape from L.A.* for the first time, viewers may feel twinges that this outing is a step down from the first film—that it's one of those sequels determined to hit the exact same story beats as the original, with only a change in locale and character names. These twinges may intensify during some of the action setpieces, which fly so far over the top that they verge on satire—Snake and surfer Pipeline (Peter Fonda) hanging 10 atop a bitchin' digital tidal wave while backed by shimmery Dick Dale surf-guitar licks, or when noted Lakers fanatic Carpenter has Snake gamble his freedom on a full-court free-throw derby (Snake has astonishingly precise depth perception for only having one eye—way to overcome your handicap!). The credits roll, and darned if those twinges haven't proven correct.

Nevertheless, this film is an essential link in any Carpenter collection. Knocking behavioral tenets of wings both right and left, *Escape from L.A.* stands as Carpenter's firmest libertarian statement, and one drawn during years when stifling political correctness prevailed across the nation. The chance to have subversive Snake return to make that statement is perfect; most would call *Vampires* the closest Carpenter has gotten to an outright Western, but the futuristic rogue remains Carpenter's purest re-envisioning of those Panavision cowboys he grew up adoring, albeit very far from the polite do-gooders of eras past.

Snake's an antiheroic gunslinger kicking dust in the face of the establishment, or onto whatever color of Stetson is foolish enough to cross him. He's simply a weary cynic with tattered honor, brought to life by Russell, growling insolent dialogue through clenched teeth like a testier Clint Eastwood. Never as desperate as R.J. MacReady, not lovably clueless like Jack Burton, the eternally bad-ass Plissken remains the highlight of the fruitful Carpenter/Russell collaboration.

It's also great fun to witness Snake interacting with a new group of "friends." Bruce Campbell cameos as an insane plastic surgeon and victim of a bungled facelift who looks like a G.I. Joe toy after three minutes in the microwave. Steve Buscemi handles the Ernest Borgnine part as the weasely Eddie, Snake's untrustworthy sidekick and Cuervo confidante. The lovely Pam Grier appears as Snake's transsexual ex-partner Carjack/Hershe Las Palmas—certainly not the typical supporting character that shows up in action flicks.

Instead of poking at the obvious holes in *Escape from L.A.*, just concentrate on the joy of watching Russell carry the show with his understated charisma and bad intentions. "Us or them?" asks a character who wants Snake to choose sides at the end of the film. He should have known by then—born rebel Snake will pick himself every time, and we love him for it.

—Trevor Parker

Photo: Copyright Paramount

It was an only partially new ball game for Snake Plissken (Kurt Russell) when he had to *Escape from L.A.*

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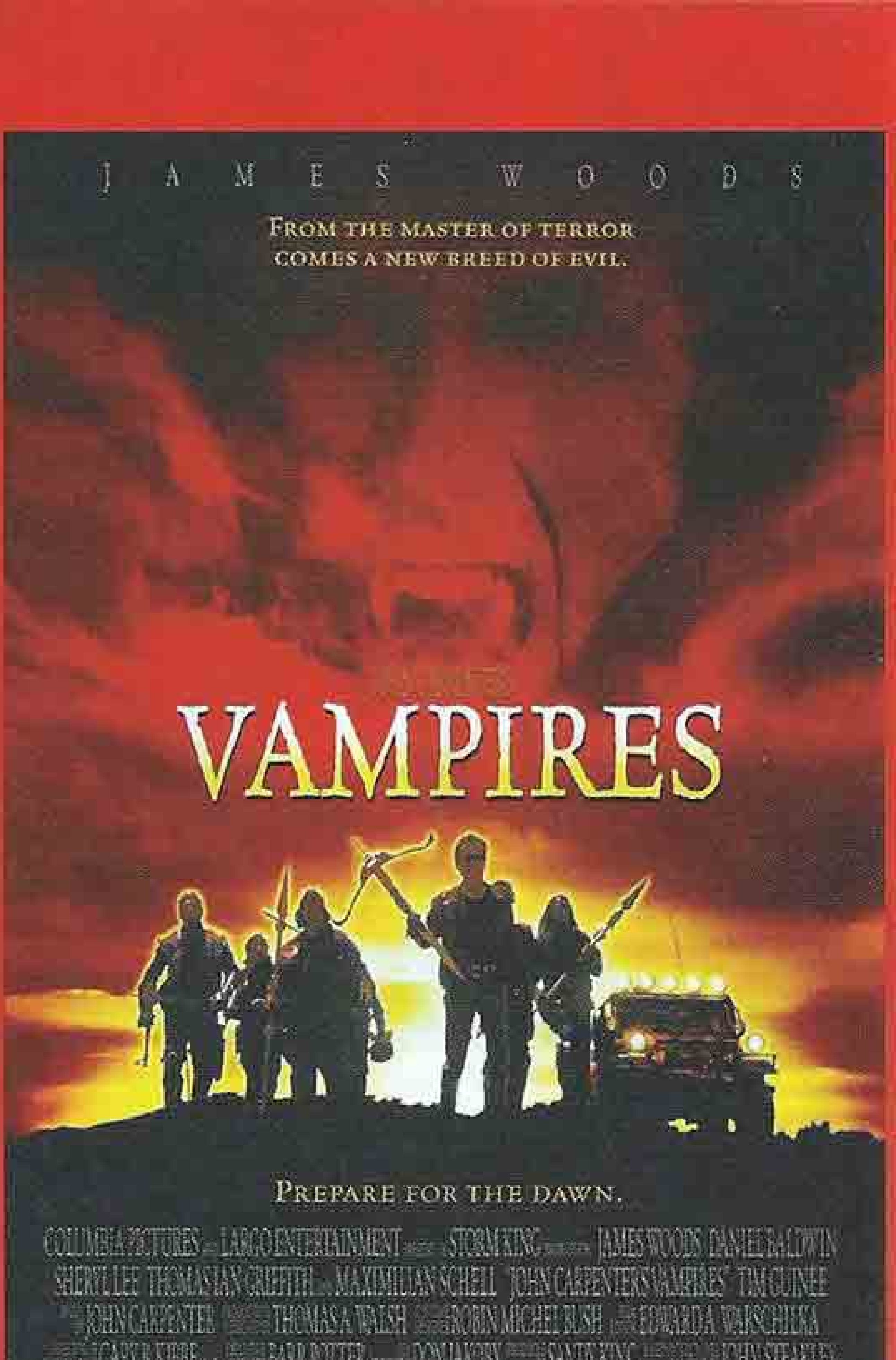
VAMPIRES

Subtlety sucks

Photos: Copyright Columbia

Valek (Thomas Ian Griffith) proves that vampires don't have to act all emo to get chicks.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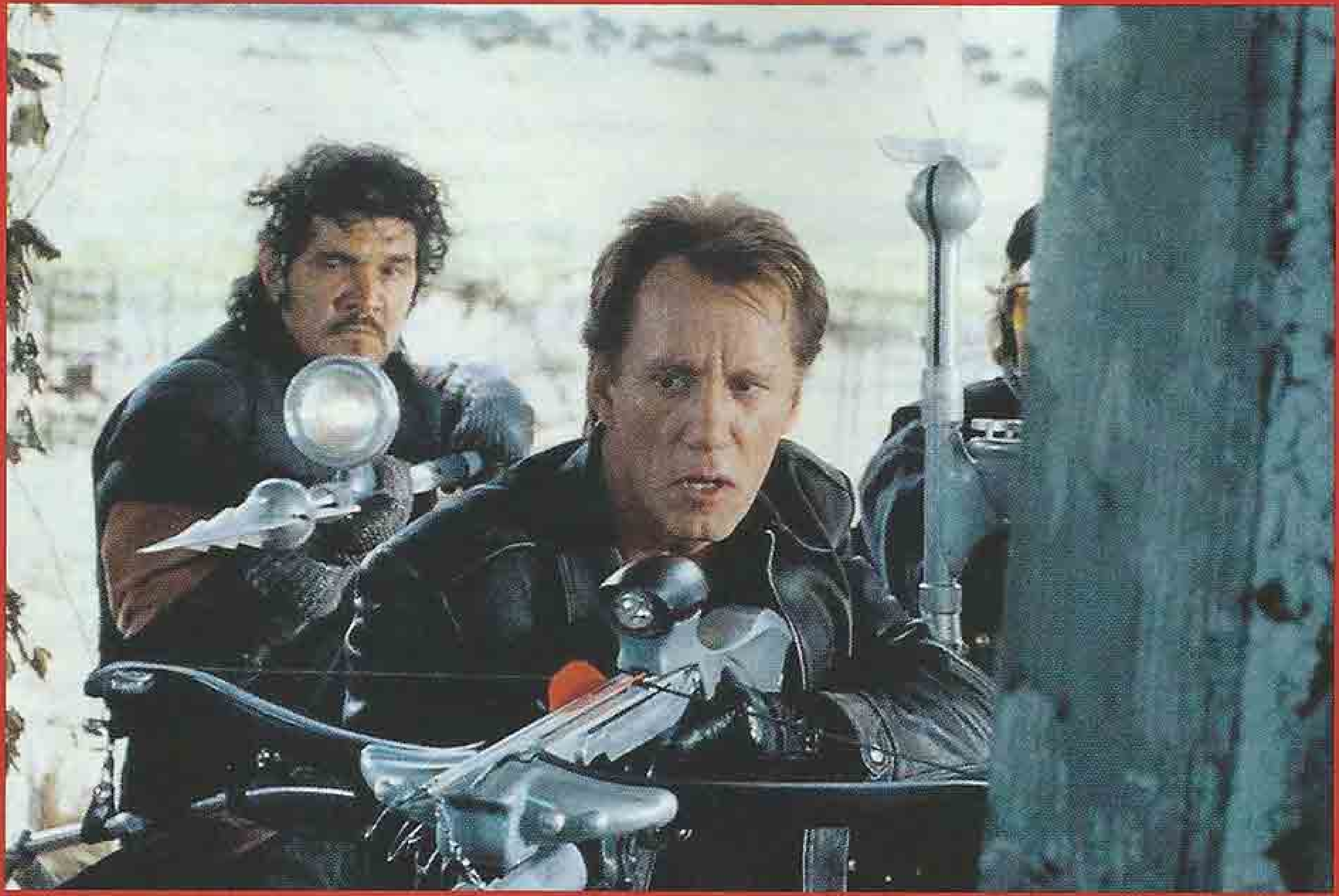
"Well, first of all, they're not romantic," relates vampire hunter Jack Crow (James Woods) to Father Adam (Tim Guinee) in 1998's *Vampires*. "It's not like they're a bunch of f**kin' fags hoppin' around in rented formal wear and seducing everybody in sight with cheesy Eurotrash accents, all right? Forget whatever you've seen in the movies: They don't turn into bats, and crosses don't work." With that colorful exposition, John Carpenter set about reinventing the bloodsucker mythos in his controversial horror/Western opus.

By the late '90s, the filmmaker had dealt with the bogeyman (*Halloween*), ghosts (*The Fog*), possession (*Christine*), aliens (*The Thing, Starman, They Live*), invisibility (*Memoirs of an Invisible Man*) and even Elvis (*Elvis*), but he had yet to tackle cinema's most durable monster. When Largo Entertainment purchased the rights to John Steakley's successful novel *Vampire$*, the company hired two screenwriters—Don Jakoby and Dan Mazur—to adapt it before approaching Carpenter. While unimpressed with both scripts, the director saw an opportunity to take an age-old mythology and head down a different path with it. He signed on, bringing wife Sandy King aboard as producer, making *Vampires* the freshman outing for their newly christened Storm King Productions.

In order to tell the story he wanted, Carpenter tore into both scripts and the book, mixing and matching their ideas with his own (though Jakoby retains sole screenwriting credit). The result is a blend of a few of his favorite things. Due to the botched exorcism of a rogue heretic priest during the Crusades, the Catholic Church was responsible for creating the first vampire. This master bloodsucker, Valek (played by Thomas Ian Griffith), plied his time over the centuries creating an army of the fanged dead, with his eye on obtaining the prized Berzier Cross, which was used in his original exorcism. Obtaining this relic and performing a sacrificial ceremony would mean eternal life and the ability to exist in sunlight. The only thing standing between Valek and his goal is Church-raised-and-trained slayer Crow, who has spent decades weeding out nests of fanged goons, crossbow in hand and cigarette perpetually dangling from his obscenity-spouting lips.

Carpenter enlisted KNB EFX for the gory details—and what work they had to do. Arguably the director's most violent film, *Vampires* boasts stabbings, shootings, burnings,

Katrina (Sheryl Lee) is already a lady of the evening before Valek gets his fangs into her.



Jack Crow (James Woods) and his Team employ up-to-date weapons to hunt ancient evil.

melting corpses, decapitations, ripped bodies and slashed throats—and that's just in the first 45 minutes. While both humans and vampires sustain this grisly damage, however, it is the Catholic Church that perhaps absorbs the harshest blows. Religious iconography was nothing new to Carpenter, who had previously wrestled with the devil in *Prince of Darkness* to name one, but where the Church was working to contain the evil in *Prince*, *Vampires* sees them attempting to exploit it. As co-star Daniel Baldwin (who plays slayer Anthony Montoya) defiantly explained to FANGORIA in issue #176, "I'm sure there will be members of the Church who will be really upset about things in this film. Good, let them get upset…it's fun to throw stones at the Church sometimes."

Also along for the ride, literally, is *Twin Peaks* alum Sheryl Lee, playing prostitute Katrina—a victim of Valek's bite who becomes a conduit between Crow and the master night creature. It is this character, and her treatment (mostly at Montoya's hands), that has drawn consistent criticism in the years since *Vampires* hit theaters. "Take her, I can use her!" Crow insists as he and Montoya make Katrina a prisoner due to her psychic connection to Valek, and the rest of the film follows suit, seeing Katrina tied naked to a bed, slapped, punched and transformed from sexy minx to quivering pawn as she converts from human to thirsty predator.

His name is Montoya (Daniel Baldwin), and he's a mean mother, so prepare to die—if you're a bloodsucker.

A certain masculinity permeates all of Carpenter's films, but *Vampires* is pure machismo from start to finish, relegating all female characters to whores or anonymous, short-lived ghouls. This *is* the story of a band of rough-and-tumble monster hunters who eke out a living with the daily grind of having to track down and destroy legions of the undead, so there is no glamour or time for companionship here. Crow and his crew of morally fractured warriors are all business, and when carnal urges arise, hookers are called in, not wives or girlfriends. Slaying is life, as sanctioned by the Church, and thus, Crow's life is slaying—plain and simple.

Where *Halloween* is Carpenter's "blue" film, *The Fog* is his "green" film and *Christine* is his "black" film, *Vampires* is most certainly his "red" effort. The picture is gorgeously shot by Gary B. Kibbe, delivering a rich desert environment where the skies are painted crimson, and where rubicund blood marbles pallid victim skin. Carpenter's classic mastery of every inch of frame is on display, and there is plenty of undeniably memorable imagery. Scenes of vampires clawing their way to air from under the arid sand are unforgettable, Valek is presented as a formidable foe in both look and brutality and there is no shying away from the skin-puncturing mealtime scenes.

Vampires made its budget back for distributor Columbia Pictures and then some, and landed three Saturn Awards in 1999: Best Actor (Woods), Best Music (Carpenter) and Best Makeup (KNB). It initiated a franchise that has seen two follow-ups to date (2002's *Vampires: Los Muertos*, starring Jon Bon Jovi, and 2005's in-name-only sequel *Vampires: The Turning*), and remains one of the most hotly debated films in Carpenter's catalog. This is a simple story: a Western tale of a lawman hunting a criminal through the wastelands of the dusty desert. An incredibly violent tale, yes, but exactly what you'd expect from a master of horror in his approach to one of cinema's oldest legends.

—Justin Beahm

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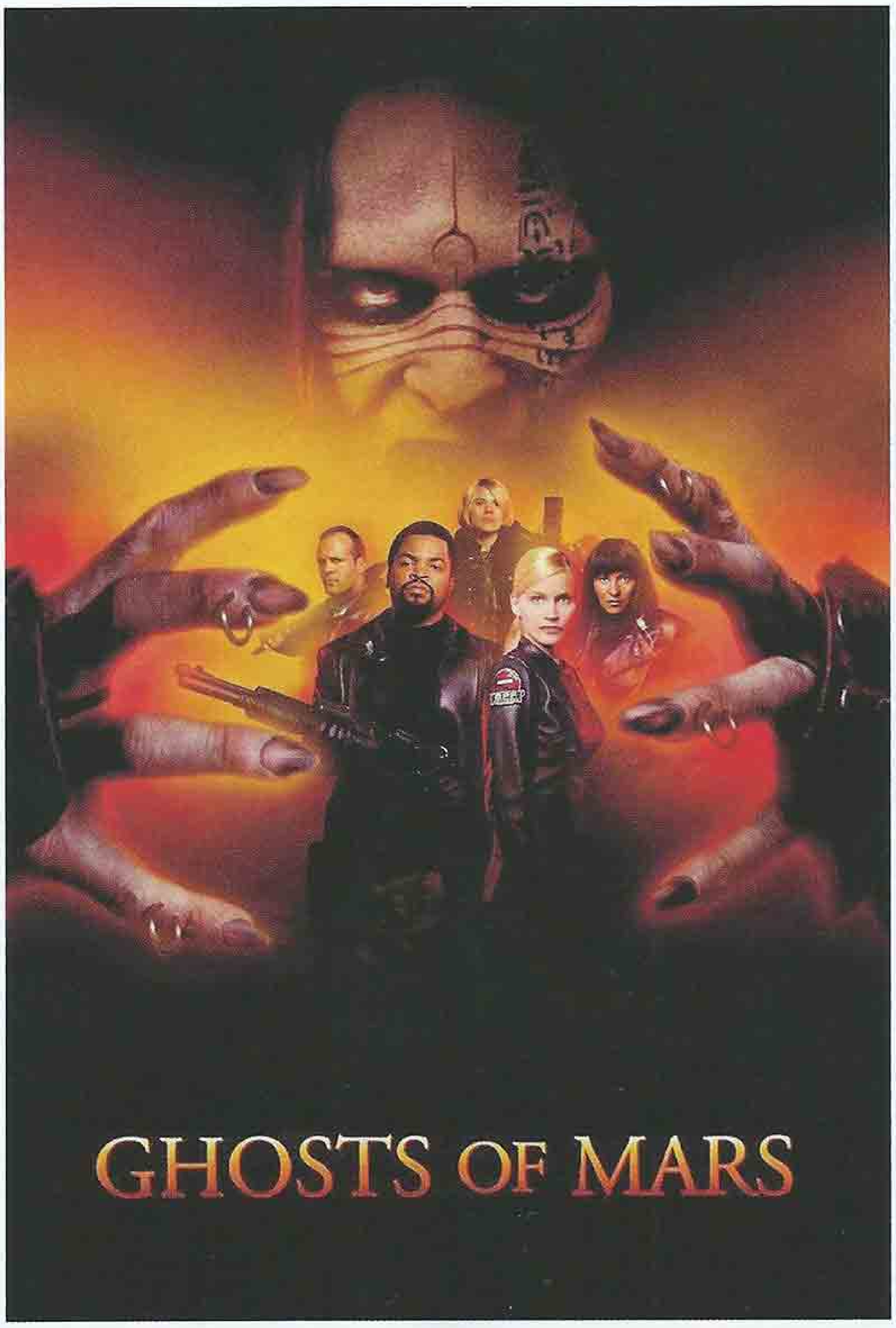
GHOSTS OF MARS

Badass, not bad



This humble Fango scribe is thrilled to note that there finally exists a small, enthusiastic cult around John Carpenter's muscular sci-fi epic *Ghosts of Mars*. Back when the film opened in summer 2001 and I saw it in a sparsely populated screening room, I knew it wouldn't do well, but had high hopes that one day it would be understood. I liked the picture then—or rather, I appreciated it—but I love it now. In fact, it may be my favorite John Carpenter film, full stop.

Before laughing at me and screaming, "Better than *Halloween*? Better than *The Thing*?", let me clarify that I am stating my preference for the film, not its superior quality. *Ghosts of Mars* is most assuredly a flawed picture, and I know this—though isn't every Carpenter flick? But time has been ever so kind to it, as it has to so many flawed films, and the very elements fans and critics seized upon as negative have become key to *Ghosts*' charm in the ensuing decade.

Ghosts of Mars stars *Species* sex symbol Natasha Henstridge (who jumped in after rocker Courtney Love flaked) as leather-clad Lt. Melanie Ballard, space cop. As the film opens, we find Ballard being grilled at some sort of hearing, asked to inform the court as to how exactly an entire mining colony on Mars was destroyed—and how notorious convict Desolation Williams (a scowling Ice Cube) escaped her grasp. See, Ballard and her team (which also includes cult-film heavy hitters Pam Grier and Jason Statham) were charged with bringing the murderous Williams back from the red planet for trial. But as she reveals—and as the audience learns via a feature-length flashback—the outpost was obliterated not by loose cannon Williams and his goons, but rather a long-dormant tribe of malevolent spirits buried in the Martian hills.

Said ghosts of the title boast the power of possession, and very quickly, the workers—men and women alike—are turned into snarling, self-mutilating ghouls led by the monstrous "Big Daddy Mars" (Richard Cetrone), with a penchant for hurling blades at the non-possessed and lopping off their heads. Needless to say, plenty of craniums are separated from their gushing necks.

Ghosts of Mars came out at the wrong time, a point when Goth rocker Marilyn Manson's shtick was already on the decline. Thus, placing KNB EFX's post-industrial Big Daddy Mars design front and center on the poster was—from a marketing standpoint—the kiss of death for general audiences, and even more so for ardent Carpenter fans. Accusations of the director losing the plot were in place even before bums landed in seats, though when all was said and done, not many cheeks showed up at all, and *Ghosts* was a miserable flop.

In that context, I get the commercial deep-six, but I've never understood both the critical and hardcore-flock dismissal. As soon as the film fades in from black, it is clear we're in the master's hands, with a speeding train marauding across a dusty, crimson desert landscape while Carpenter's pulsing, chug-a-chug electronic score clickety-clacks on the soundtrack, goosed by Steve Vai's wailing guitar (Anthrax and Buckethead also show up for the soundtrack party). *Ghosts*' music may be Carpenter's most punishing and fully realized soundscape ever—tough, sexy and razor-sharp, with plenty of nods to past high-octane scores like *Escape from New York* and *Big Trouble in Little China*, but rocketing into another level of cool.

Reptile-slick opening aside, there are myriad other reasons why *Ghosts* works. First of all, that cast: Henstridge is sexy as the heroine yet never once panders to her sexuality—she's simply a tough cop on a mission. Cube has never been better, delivering a furiously funny performance that never wavers from brow-furrowed pulp bad-assery. Couple these no-nonsense leads with equally macho support, including the aforementioned Grier and Statham (with hair!), Wanda De Jesus and Joanna Cassidy, and you have the ideal entry points into the gleefully genre-obsessed proceedings. The film not only pays homage to Carpenter's Western obsessions—*Rio Bravo*, of course, and, with the "get the misunderstood crook to the train on time" narrative thrust, *3:10 to Yuma*—it serves as a testosterone-charged unofficial remake of Mario Bava's *Planet of the Vampires* larded with an orgy of dissolves, flashbacks and splattering gore, both practical and, in some cases—but not woefully so—digital.

Draped in endless action, campy but never snide or ironic humor and—oh, oh, oh, that music!—*Ghosts of Mars* might be Carpenter's most undervalued work. And if not his best, it's the one that this writer keeps revisiting time and again. Rediscover it already, won't you?

—*Chris Alexander*

Photo: Copyright Screen Gems

Seriously, how can anyone not dig a John Carpenter movie that packs Ice Cube, Jason Statham and Clea DuVall in its cast?

THE WARD

Still an institution

The Ward is undoubtedly one of horror's most maligned works in recent memory—but as is often the case with John Carpenter's constructions, a cushion of time will help fade its imperfections and burnish its merits. A modest, scaled-back effort that was cursed by fans' feverish anticipation for a grand big-screen Carpenter comeback, *The Ward* was relegated to a confusing bumble of a release in 2011 by ARC Entertainment/XLrator Media that stoked worries the distributor was quietly dumping what they felt to be a hopeless product.

Most reviews also lambasted *The Ward* for implementing the most tired of twists during the finale, a screenwriting crutch so routine that it now almost plays as parody (see Donald Kaufman's blithely absurd screenplay pitch in Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* for a succinct skewering of this stale story device). This, no doubt, caused many to walk away from *The Ward* with a spot of indigestion and ready to pen Carpenter's filmic obituary. Not so fast; it's time to step back, take a deep breath and reappraise this spooky journey.

Flexing a plot that can be simplified as *Girl, Interrupted* meets *The Grudge*, the '60s-set *Ward* is blessed with a determined, dynamic star in Amber Heard, and in her Carpenter finds his strongest female lead since the Adrienne Barbeau era (apologies to Natasha Henstridge's sleepy turn in *Ghosts of Mars*). Heard plays Kristen, who is arrested for a very unrepentant instance of arson at the start of the movie and becomes the newest inmate at the criminal psychiatric institution of the title. As her fellow patients are picked off in quick succession, Kristen finds that the hospital is haunted by a deceased former prisoner. Demonstrating escape and lock-picking aptitude that would shame Houdini, she must secretly roam the hospital's foreboding hallways and uncover the secret behind the haunting before the ward's dark past catches up with her.

If nothing else, *The Ward* serves as a case study on just how powerful a semiotic presence Carpenter's music can be. Due to a desire to scale back his workload, Carpenter relinquished scoring duties to composer Mark Kilian, whose Tyler Bates-style clanging stabs here are a poor substitute for Carpenter's usual unsettling synth undercurrent. This unfortunate change is chiefly responsible for *The Ward* not immediately feeling like the return of the man we know and worship. On the plus side, Carpenter's genius for strategizing jump-scares is absolutely undiminished. The veteran magician dusts off his wand to conjure up some masterful sleight-of-hand and misdirection, the best of which involves a character crouching inside a tiny, cramped dumbwaiter. Here, Carpenter exploits the audience's spatial assumptions as the ghostly figure jolts to an impossibly upright height in the background of the shot.

It's also a blast to see the usually straightforward Carpenter experimenting with his visual style, working with a bleached color palette and employing funky filters in his flashback sequences. He makes wonderful use of the film's photogenic practical location (the abandoned Eastern State mental hospital in Spokane, Washington), and his Steadicam glides through the facility's stern concrete bowers with authority.

Admittedly short of his previous greatness, *The Ward* is nonetheless a tense, watchable and assured return for Carpenter that has been unfairly pilloried. Best to just nudge that clichéd ending aside and enjoy the remaining hour and 20 minutes as a straight-up ghost story with plenty to recommend.

—*Trevor Parker*

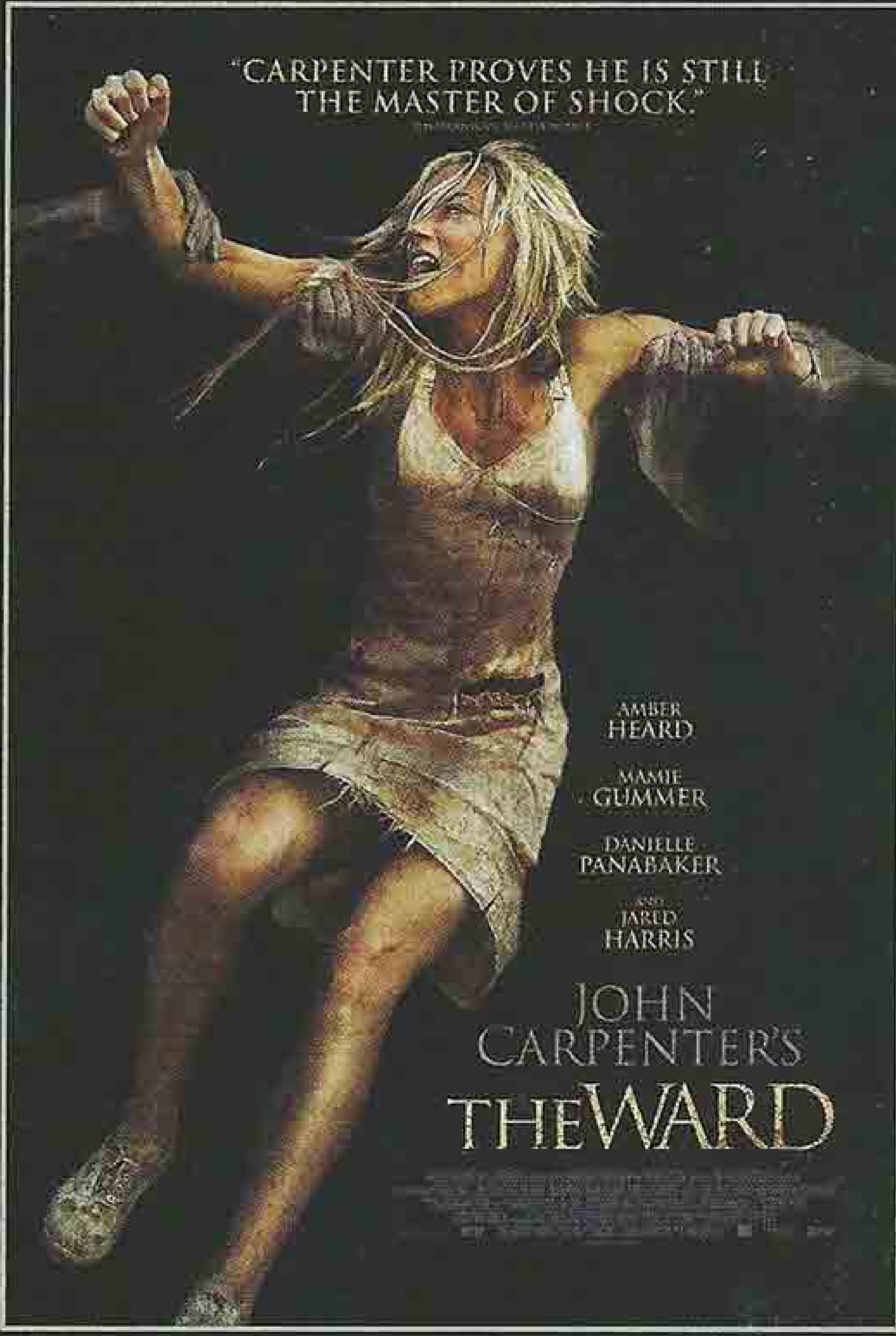


Photo: Copyright ARC Entertainment/XLrator Media

Three decades after *Halloween*, another teenage Carpenter heroine shared the widescreen frame with an ominous shape.

THE WRITTEN WARD

Scripters Michael and Shawn Rasmussen first opened the asylum doors for Carpenter's most recent feature.

By MICHAEL GINGOLD

John Carpenter (with star Amber Heard) made simplicity a point when developing *The Ward.*

When John Carpenter returned to the feature-film director's chair for the first time in nearly a decade after *Ghosts of Mars*, it was not on a project he generated himself. Brothers Michael and Shawn Rasmussen had attracted the auteur's attention with a screenplay called *The Ward*, which became the 2011 film starring Amber Heard as Kristen, a teenaged girl in the 1960s who becomes an inmate at a mental hospital for young women, where the phantom of a dead patient haunts the living. Below, the Rasmussens (who also scripted and directed this year's release *Dark Feed*) explain how their vision was filtered through Carpenter's to end up on screen.

FANGORIA: How did *The Ward* get to John Carpenter in the first place?

SHAWN RASMUSSEN: We had written the script for ourselves, as something we wanted to make, and were in the process of trying to get it set up when our agent asked us if he could send it out to some companies in LA before we actually got started. He sent it to a production company, Echo Lake, which also manages John Carpenter, and they really liked it, and wanted to buy the script for John. When we heard that, we were like, "Wow, that's pretty amazing—yeah, definitely!" A couple of weeks later, we had our first conference call with John to talk about the project.

MICHAEL RASMUSSEN: Which was very cool.

SHAWN: I think we were excited more just by the prospect of getting to talk to John Carpenter and work with John Carpenter. We had no expectations that the movie would actually get made; we were realistic. So we got on that conference call with John and the Echo Lake team, and he was very complimentary of the script, but I guess he had not read it before they bought it. So on that call, he said, "I really like the writing, but I don't have any interest in directing this project." [*Laughs*]

MICHAEL: At that time, it was a very different story. It took place in more of a modern-day hospital with all this technology, and when the lead character had to escape, it was in very clever, technology-driven ways. Plus, the hospital itself had a very Gothic feel to it. John felt it was too Gothic and dark, and I believe he wanted something that was more like what it ended up being, which was a period piece yet with a timeless quality—a throwback kind of thing.

SHAWN: It took him about a year and a half after that first call. The general idea must have been percolating for a while before he came back and told the guys at Echo Lake, "Hey, I really am interested in this project, and I would like the Rasmussen brothers to develop it with me."

MICHAEL: It won him over [*laughs*].

FANG: What went into the collaborative process of redrafting the script with him?

MICHAEL: That was very cool. We went up to LA and met with him over three days; we went through it page by page, and he had a lot of notes. He came in with a stack of papers about this high, and right off the bat, he knew the history of mental illness and said, "You know, you can't hold a person against their will in the current mental health field. There was a decision in 1970 to change that, so we need to set the story before then." Right away we said, "OK, the technology's got to be retrograded." At the time, there was computer surveillance monitoring and things like that in the script, so we were like, "How are we gonna pull this off?"

SHAWN: And modern therapy, modern treatments…

MICHAEL: Yeah, pills, pharmaceuticals and stuff. Also, he felt we maybe had too many things going on at once; we had the ghost, but we also had a menacing hospital staff, and John said, "Let's just focus on the ghost; that's all we really need." So he drove it that way, and really helped gear it toward something he wanted to do.

> **“We [originally] had a menacing hospital staff, and John said, ‘Let’s just focus on the ghost; that’s all we really need.’ ” —Michael Rasmussen**

Having their script in John Carpenter's hands helped Shawn (left) and Michael Rasmussen *Ward* off any doubts.

SHAWN: And he made it a better story. Originally, we felt it would be interesting to have a staff that was physically abusing the patients at the same time there was this ghost in the hospital, and have the audience wondering what's going on. That was one aspect he thought about, and decided, "I want the audience to be caught up in the story, and if you have too many things happening, it'll confuse them and take them out of it."

MICHAEL: He also said, "That's too easy"—making the menacing staff member a Nurse Ratched type and that kind of thing. He wanted to do stuff we hadn't seen in a mental-hospital film. And I've heard that a lot of the positive comments about *The Ward* have been like, "It's nice to see the staff member, when propositioned by Danielle Panabaker's character, just kind of push her off, and is not at all engaged in it." It's neat to hear that people appreciate that change.

Ward Photos: Copyright ARC Entertainment/XLrator Media

Behavior like this won't get Kristen (Heard, with Danielle Panabaker) an early release.

FANG: Were you on the set at all while Carpenter was shooting?

MICHAEL: No, we weren't.

FANG: Did you advise on cuts of the movie while he was editing?

MICHAEL: They let us look at a rough cut. They had things they wanted us to give notes on, and it was quite a bit different from what they eventually went with. They ended up doing reshoots after that, and added the flashbacks to the character in the basement who was tormenting the girl.

SHAWN: That was in one of the iterations of the script…

MICHAEL: They brought it back in.

SHAWN: What's interesting was that when we watched the new cut they sent us, there were a couple of scenes we loved in that original version that they had to take out for pacing or whatever. It was intriguing from that perspective, to see something so beautifully shot and then realize it had to be taken out for story purposes.

FANG: Can you talk about what any of those lost scenes involved?

SHAWN: What we really thought was awesome was a daytime scene in the rec yard where Amber Heard's character has been left alone out there, and the way John shot it, she kind of moves to one side and you can see the ghostly Alice lingering in the background, but out of focus. It's really a haunting moment.

FANG: Can you sum up your experience with Carpenter on *The Ward*?

MICHAEL: When we first showed up, we didn't know what it was going to be like, because he's this iconic figure; we had grown up watching his movies. He had helped shape our writing style and what we view as horror. And when we met him, he was really down-to-earth and collaborative. I was surprised by how much he had his ideas, but told us, "It's up to you guys to write it. I'm not going to tell you *how* to write it, but this is what I want." I think it helped that he wrote a lot of his earlier stuff himself, and it helped us to be working with somebody who has been a writer; he understands what it's like to have people giving notes to you [*laughs*]. I feel like he was very sensitive to that.

Also, he kept challenging us—for example, in the sequence in the dumbwaiter; he was like, "On paper, this is great, guys. But how am I gonna shoot this? Where will the camera be?" Stuff like that. And it started us thinking. I never considered while I was writing, "How is a director going to accomplish this? How are they gonna pull it off?" Same with when she escapes out of the straitjacket; John said, "This has to be plausible; it has to be something I can shoot that looks like something she really did." That has totally changed the way we write now.

SHAWN: We always think: How can it be shot?

The screenwriters got along with their director like a house on fire.

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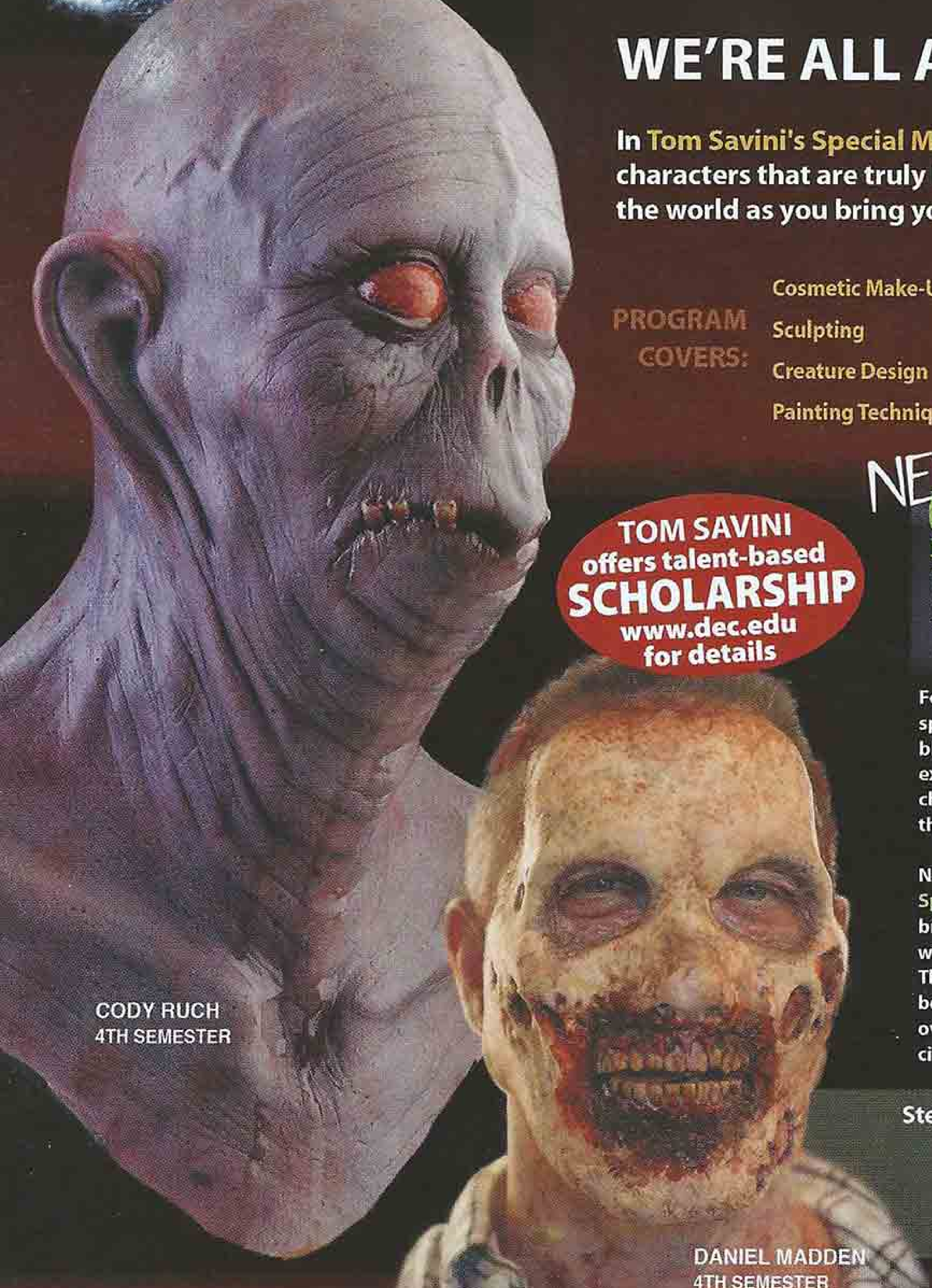

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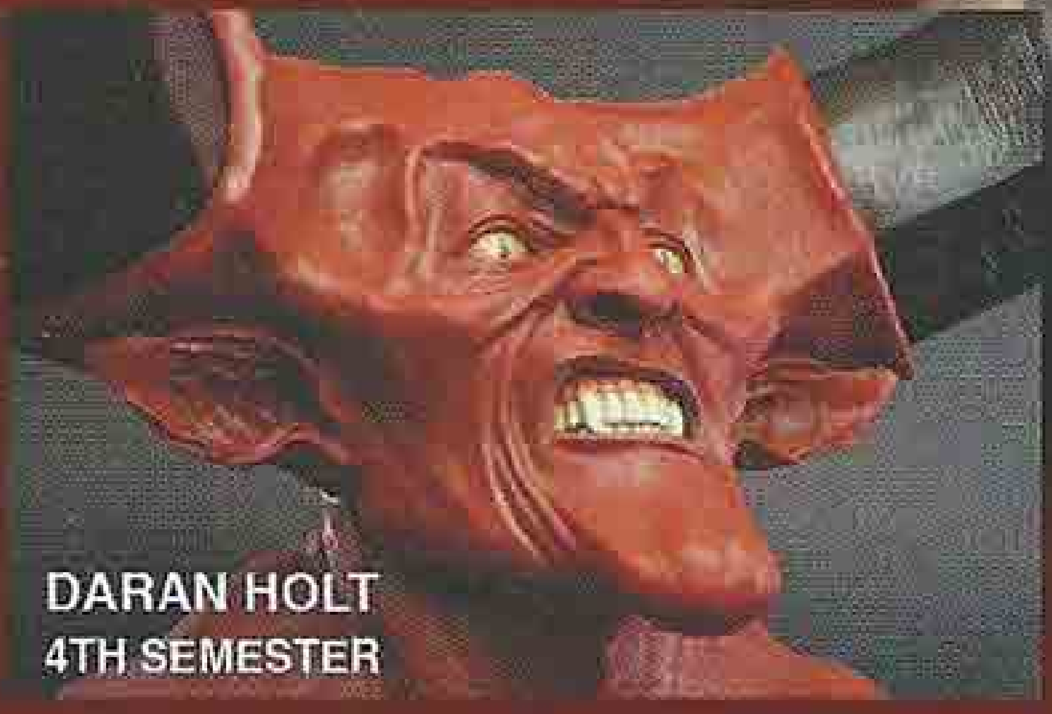

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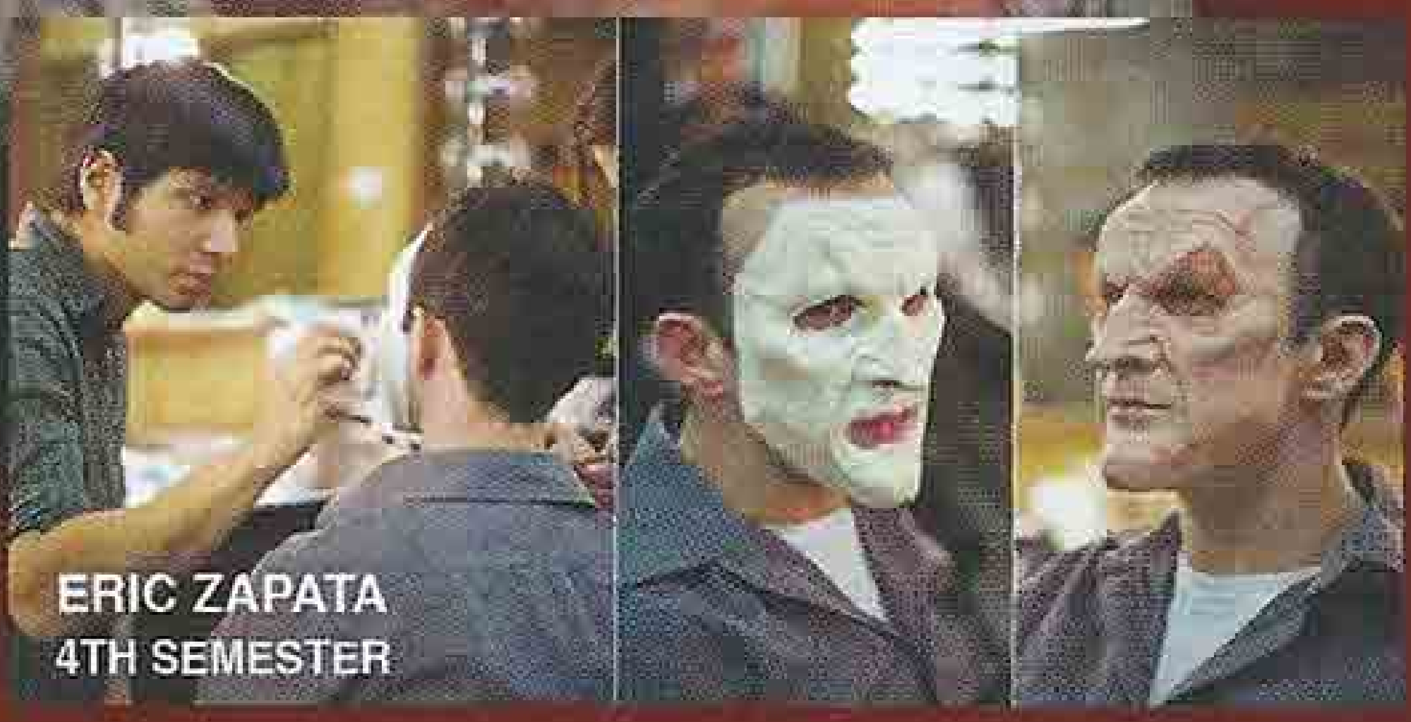

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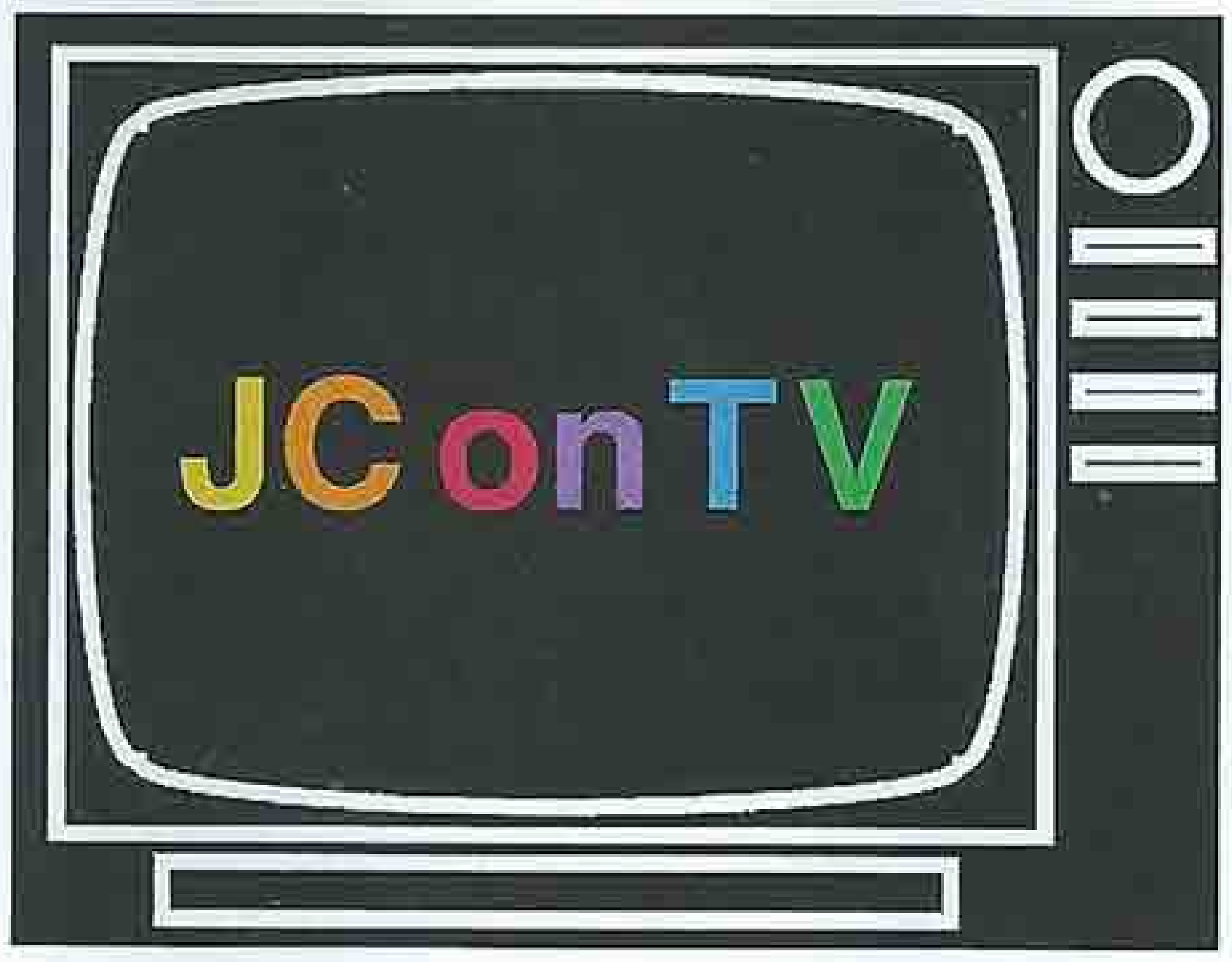

JC on TV

The first decade of John Carpenter's brick-by-brick road to becoming a FANGORIA Legend was spent—as with every future auteur with fire in his or her belly—hustling on the sidelines. In between laying the groundwork with *Dark Star* and *Assault on Precinct 13*, writing what became the lurid Faye Dunaway vehicle *The Eyes of Laura Mars* and, of course, changing history with *Halloween*, he did his fair share of small-screen work, both writing and directing—and would continue to do so throughout his career. Carpenter's TV credits are a fascinating grab bag of genre experiments—some more successful than others, but all integral pieces of his larger puzzle. Let's have a look…

***Zuma Beach* (1978):** Carpenter co-wrote this lightweight teen comedy, a vehicle to show *Three's Company* sex symbol Suzanne Somers in her finest, figure-hugging swimwear. Its greatest claim to fame is that it came out the same year as *Halloween*, and it's far from essential viewing. That said, as far as late-'70s TV movies go, it's a rather fun bit of fluff.

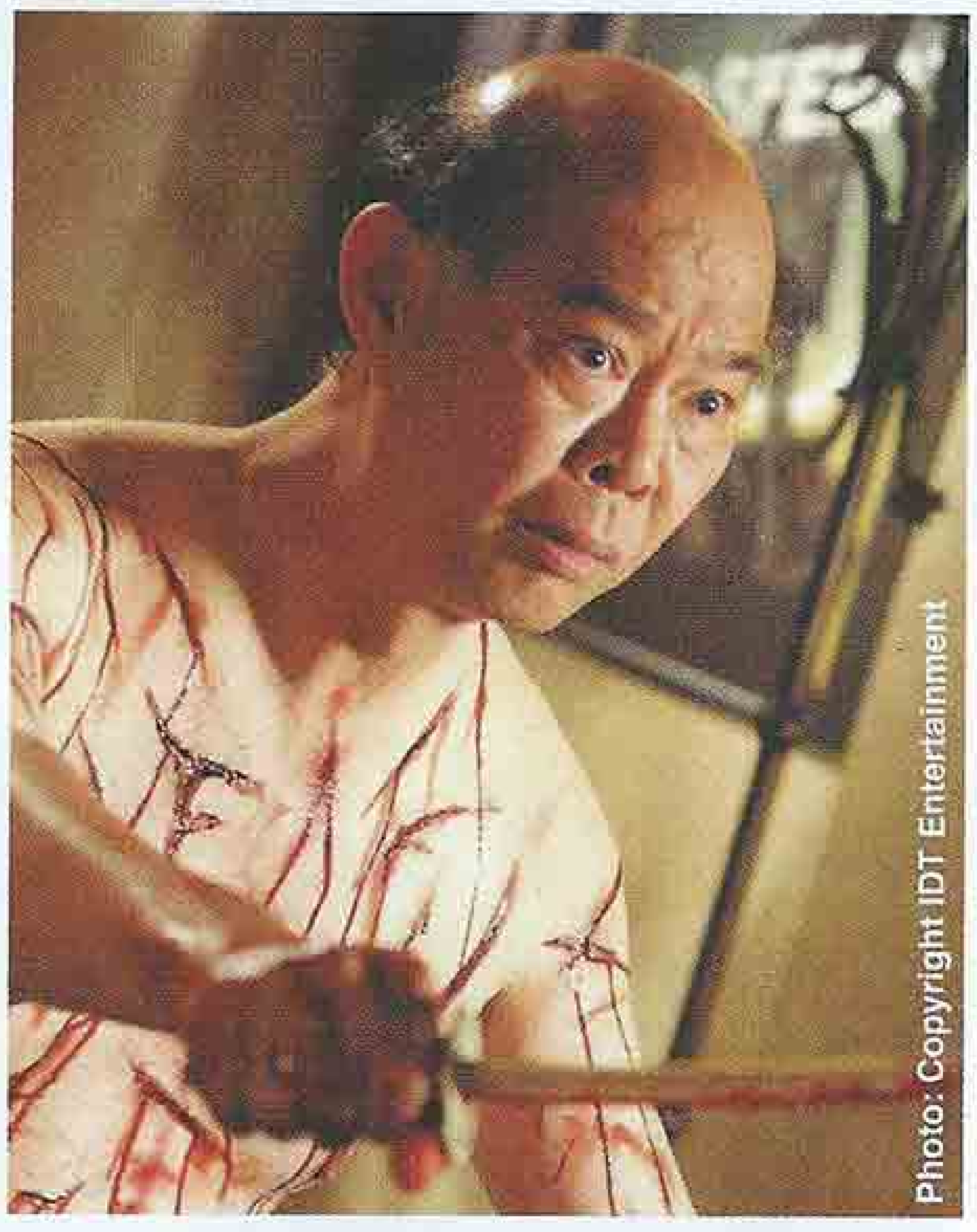
Photo: Copyright IDT Entertainment

***Cigarette Burns* can be hazardous to your health in the *Masters of Horror* episode (with Colin Foo).**

***Someone's Watching Me!* (1978):** Carpenter's other thriller from '78 (a busy year!) was this oft-overlooked gem, a stylish potboiler starring gap-toothed Lauren Hutton as a woman who is, as the title suggests, being spied on by a not-very-nice lunatic. Filled with fluid camerawork, this very cinematic telefilm has a strong Italian *giallo* sheen, and one wonders how much better it might have been if the director had done the music as well. Co-starring future *The Fog* heroine and Bride of Carpenter Adrienne Barbeau.

***Elvis* (1979):** It doesn't get much better than this kinetic salute to The King, starring Kurt Russell in a star-making performance that rescued him from the dead end of Disney films. Outside of the fact that this is one helluva great rock 'n' roll biopic, *Elvis* is a vital entry in the Carpenter canon, as it laid the foundation for the personal and professional relationship he and Russell would forge, resulting in some of both men's most beloved works.

***Better Late Than Never* (1979):** This gentle, heartfelt dramedy (co-authored by Carpenter, and directed by Richard Crenna!) about a bunch of scrappy seniors trying to shake up their retirement home features a great cast, including Strother Martin and Tyne Daly. Hard to find, but a winning curio.

***El Diablo* (1990):** Carpenter has made any number of stealth Westerns, but here he actually had his hand in a legitimate one, written with frequent collaborator Tommy Lee Wallace. Anthony Edwards and Louis Gossett Jr. star in this entertaining cable flick, a riff on *The Searchers* by way of, maybe, *Cat Ballou*.

***Blood River* (1991):** Carpenter goes straight oater again with this entertaining saga, starring Ricky Schroeder as a kid running from the baddie who killed his parents. Co-starring *The Thing*'s Wilford Brimley.

***Body Bags* (1993):** This quirky cult item sees Carpenter donning heavy makeup and delivering a funny performance as The Coroner, a Crypt Keeper-esque host who introduces three silly tales (two of which he directed, with the third helmed by Tobe Hooper). Not a scary film, but plenty of fun, with a cavalcade of cult filmmakers and actors making cameos, including Wes Craven and UK model Twiggy.

***Silent Predators* (1999):** Carpenter's double-decade-old script *Fangs*—about a colony of killer rattlesnakes—was resurrected for this pithy flick, starring *Clash of the Titans*' Harry Hamlin as a fireman running afoul of the scaly attackers. Standard stuff, but it does feature a supporting turn by *The Bad Seed*'s Patty McCormack.

***Masters of Horror: Cigarette Burns* (2005):** The director's return to TV terror was cited as one of the best entries in the first season of Mick Garris' bold series, and it certainly is a highlight. Future *Walking Dead* hero Norman Reedus is great as a cinema gumshoe driven to madness trying to track down a cursed 35mm print of a mythical horror film, while the great Udo Kier bugs out his eyes on the sidelines. Plenty of fun, sporting welcome dollops of Carpenter atmosphere.

***Masters of Horror: Pro-Life* (2006):** The superior Carpenter *Masters* episode, this maniacal, politically charged revisit of Carpenter fave *Rio Bravo* sees a crazed pro-lifer (Ron Perlman) stopping at nothing to prevent his daughter from having an abortion—including wasting anyone at the clinic who gets in his way. And there's a monster too. A brave, dark, satirical and pulse-pounding bit of classic Carpenter.

—Chris Alexander

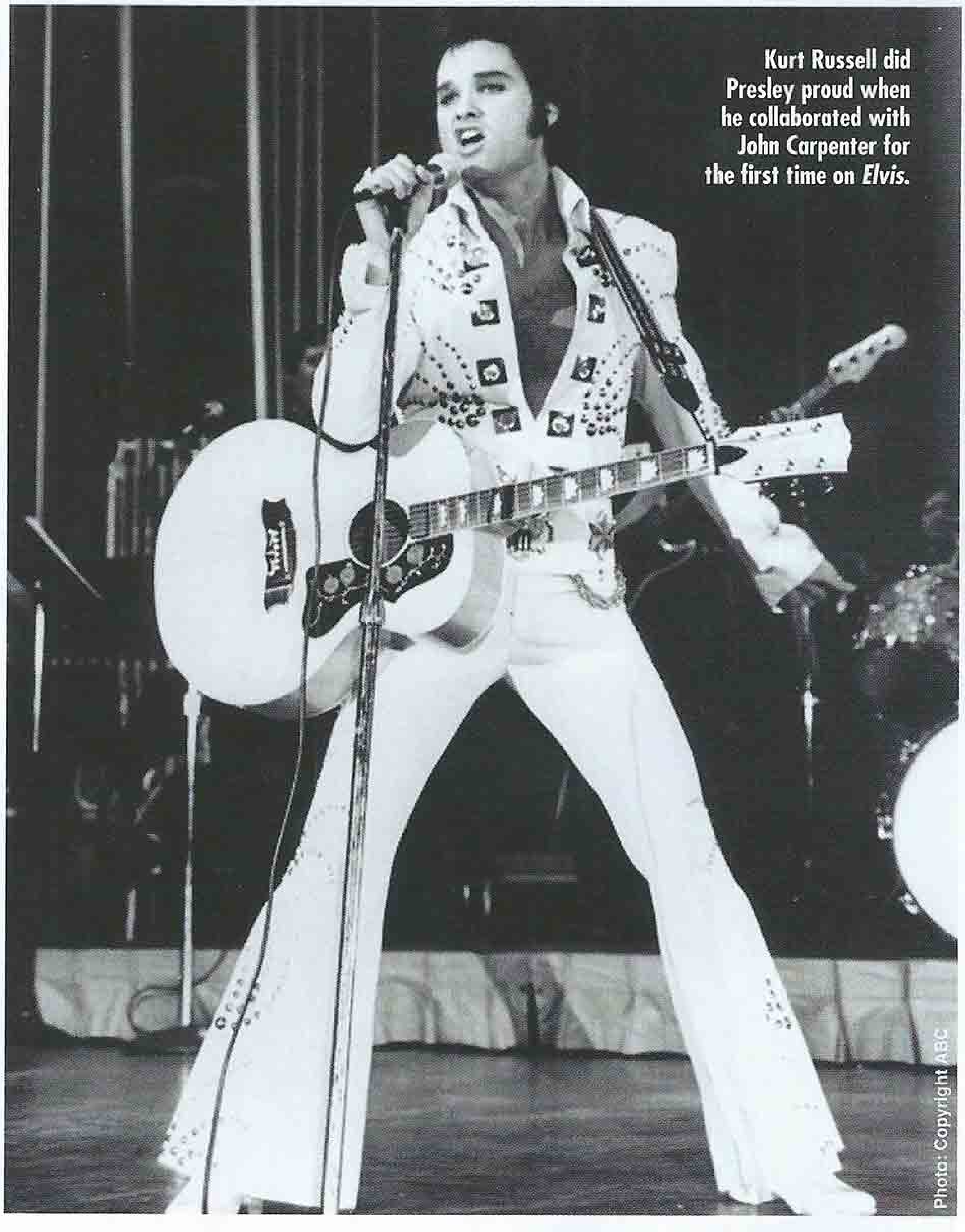
Kurt Russell did Presley proud when he collaborated with John Carpenter for the first time on *Elvis*.

Photo: Copyright ABC

In The Mind Of Madness

Words by CHRIS ALEXANDER
Photos by JOHN HUMPHREY

The workspace of any artist is key to understanding his or her output. It's their psychic profile, their control center, their main brain. We crept into John Carpenter's nerve station for a peek at his stuff…and what glorious stuff it is: Bits and pieces of the writer/director's history, his taste in pop culture and hints at his future.

Have a look…

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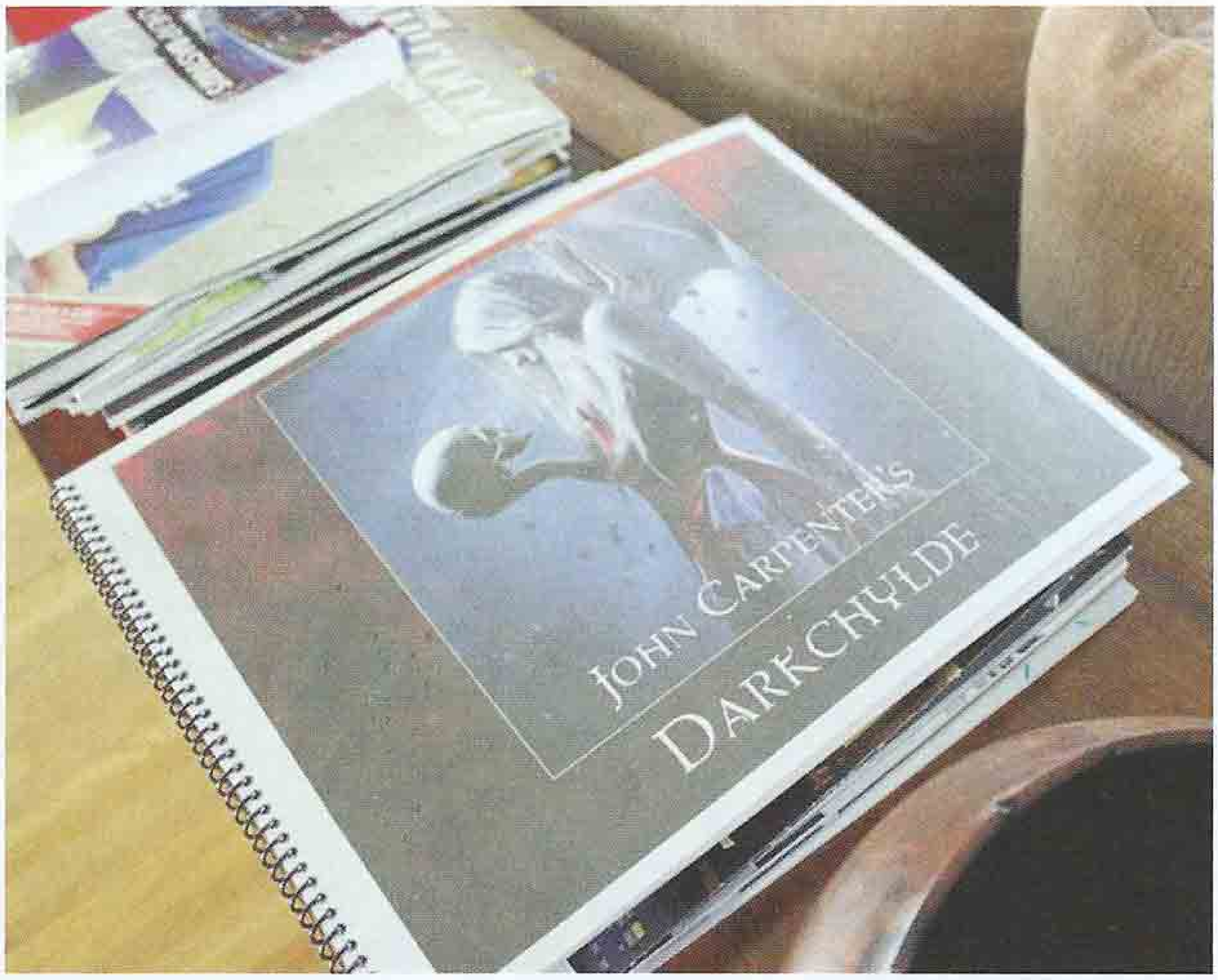
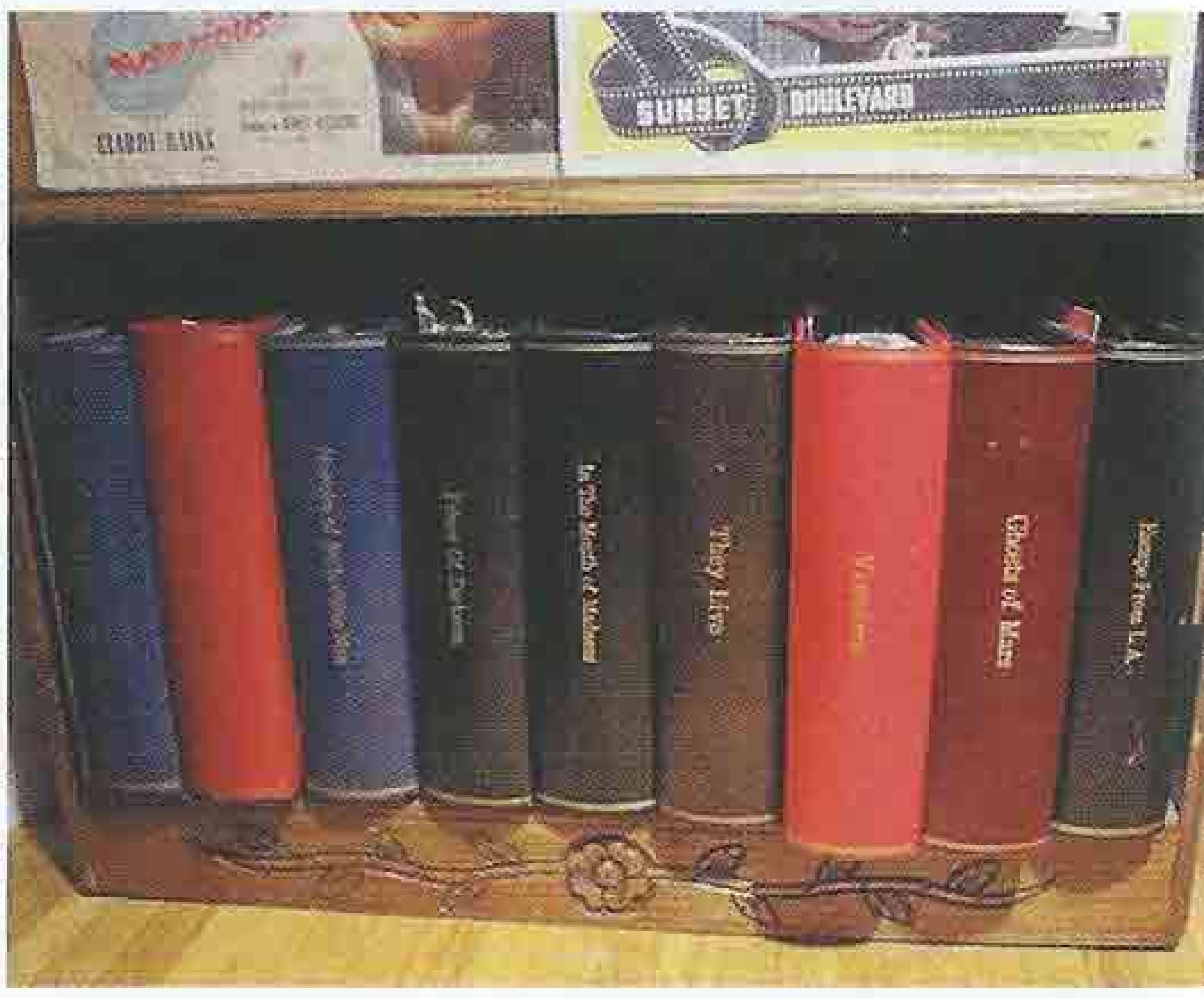
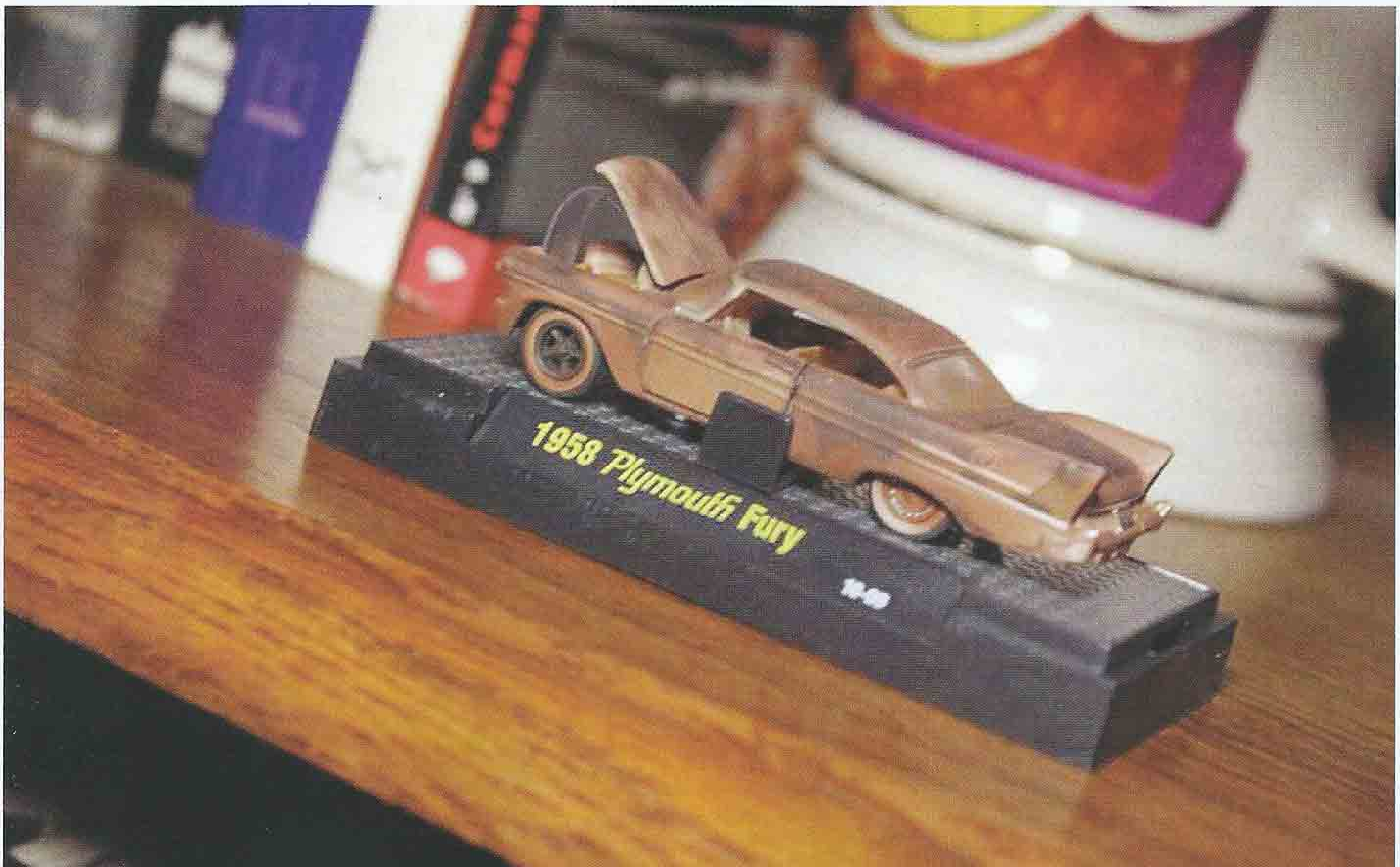
SON of FRANKENSTEIN
Lionel ATWILL · Josephine HUTCHINSON
THE GHOST OF FRANKENSTEIN

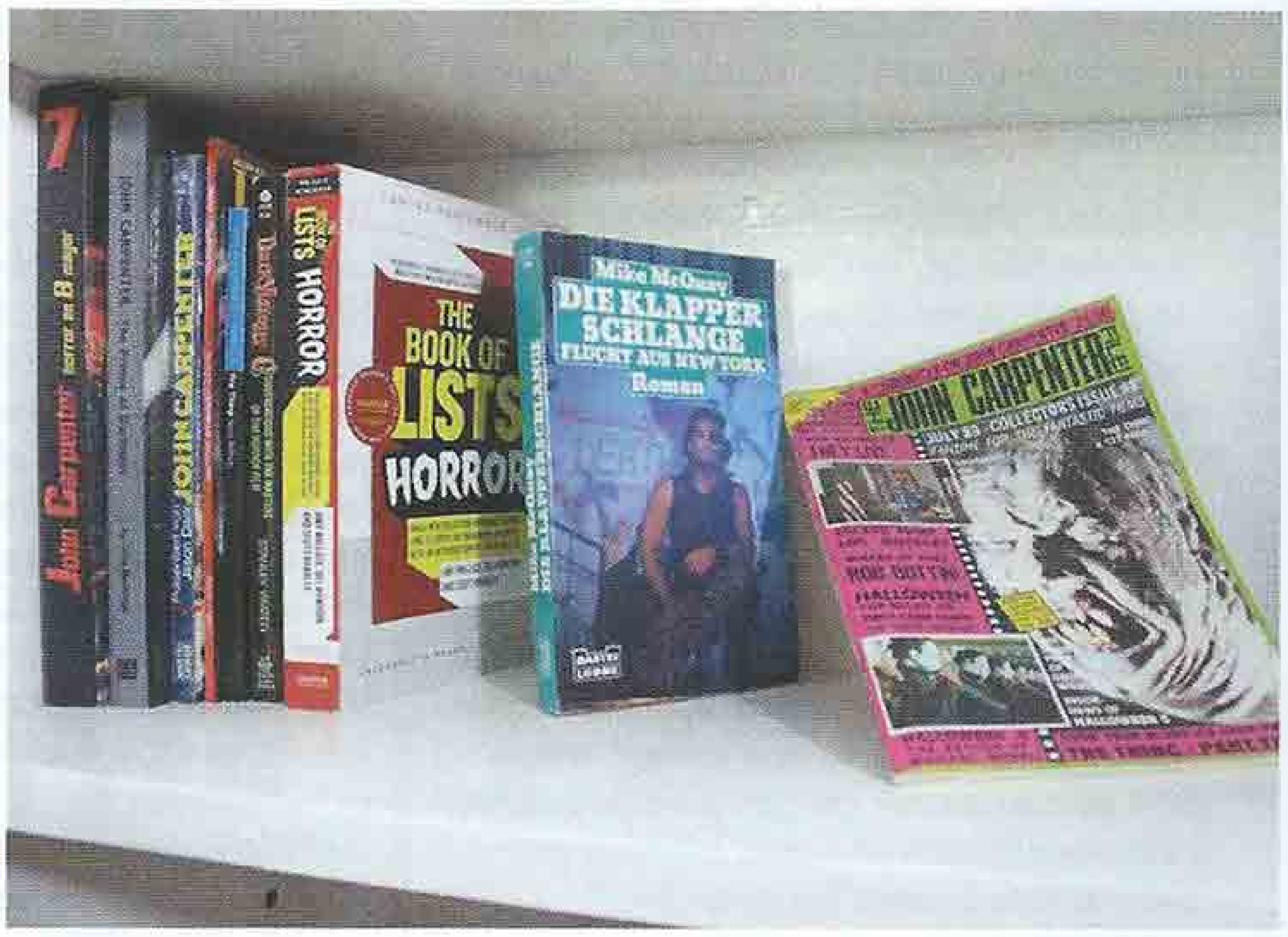

JOHN CARPENTER'S
DARKCHYLDE


CLAUDE RAINS
SUNSET BOULEVARD
In The Mouth of Madness
They Live
Ghosts of Mars
Escape from L.A.


1958 Plymouth Fury

They Live

Carpenter


John Carpenter
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TRIBUTES TO JOHN CARPENTER

Interviews by MICHAEL GINGOLD

Thomas Dekker, actor (*Village of the Damned*): "I was 6 years old when I did *Village*, and that was the movie that made me want to keep acting as a child. I'm still friends with John Carpenter to this day. He was the one who made it such an amazing experience that I told my parents, "I want to keep doing this!" I have incredibly fond memories of *Village*; I have stronger memories of that movie than of things I did when I was 16.

"It was the first time I'd ever been aware of what a filmmaker was. I was always a very curious child, and I was fascinated by John and asked him every technical question. He was such a teacher, and has continued to be my entire life. Obviously, I'm now a great fan of his work that I didn't even know of as a child, but that was just a really great experience."

Meg Foster, actress (*They Live*): "The set John creates, the people who work with him—I don't know if it's because John is also a musician, but there's a gentility and a rhythm, and the rhythm is consistent, even if things get confusing. The rhythm remains this very flowing, methodical thing, regardless of whether the pitch gets high or not. It was the most comfortable set, and everybody was so kind; John left a bouquet of flowers in my trailer the first day I was there, with a note that read, 'When it stops being fun, we stop doing it.'

"John is a consummate writer, and I believe that he is a visionary. There are writers who write novels, who write screenplays, who write farce; John can do it all. All in one sentence, he can give you fact, he can give you truth, he can give you sarcasm, he can give you satire, he can enlighten you and frighten you. I believe he's a poet."

Colin Geddes, programmer, Toronto Film Festival: "John Carpenter is incredibly diverse in his interpretation of horror. He's a director who hasn't had to make many compromises; he was never really put into that big-studio box. His movies have lived on. You look at how, when *The Thing* came out, it wasn't a hit at all, but when you watch it years later, it's such a strong, incredible film. His work is going to endure—a lot longer than many of the movies that tried to copy his style.

"My earliest memories of John Carpenter are that because I lived in a rural area, the movies were restricted and there were no theaters to even sneak into; I believe I read the novelizations of his films before I actually saw the movies. At one point, when I went with my parents to the drive-in, the second or third feature was *The Fog* and my parents wouldn't let me see it. But as we were driving out, I heard the whole ghost story around the campfire, and then it was about another eight years before I ever saw the rest of the film. So I knew how important he was, but I experienced his movies in a strange, tangential, dislocated manner."

Buddy Giovinazzo, director: "Probably my favorite John Carpenter film, because I watch it at least once or twice a year, is *The Thing*. I saw it in the theater when it came out, and I was so blown away by it, by the effects. One thing I love about Carpenter is that the acting in his films is phenomenal—all those guys in the station in *The Thing*, and even *They Live*. That is an incredible film because it's so political in many ways, but who would've thought that Roddy Piper could act like that?

"*Halloween* changed the genre; it brought horror more into the mainstream.

Rob Zombie

Colin Geddes

Buddy Giovinazzo

Photo: Michael Gingold

David Gregory

Photo: Courtesy David Gregory

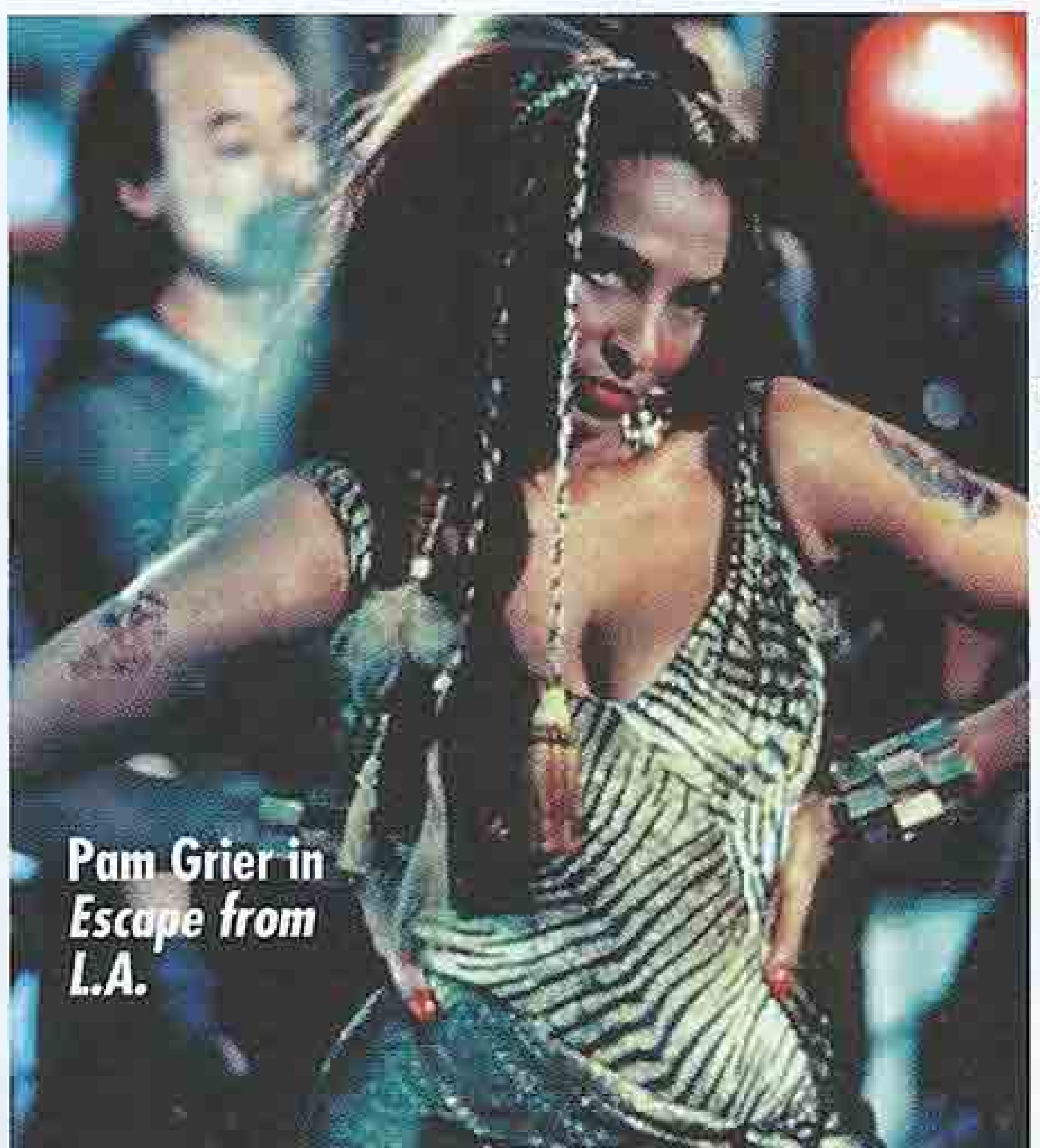
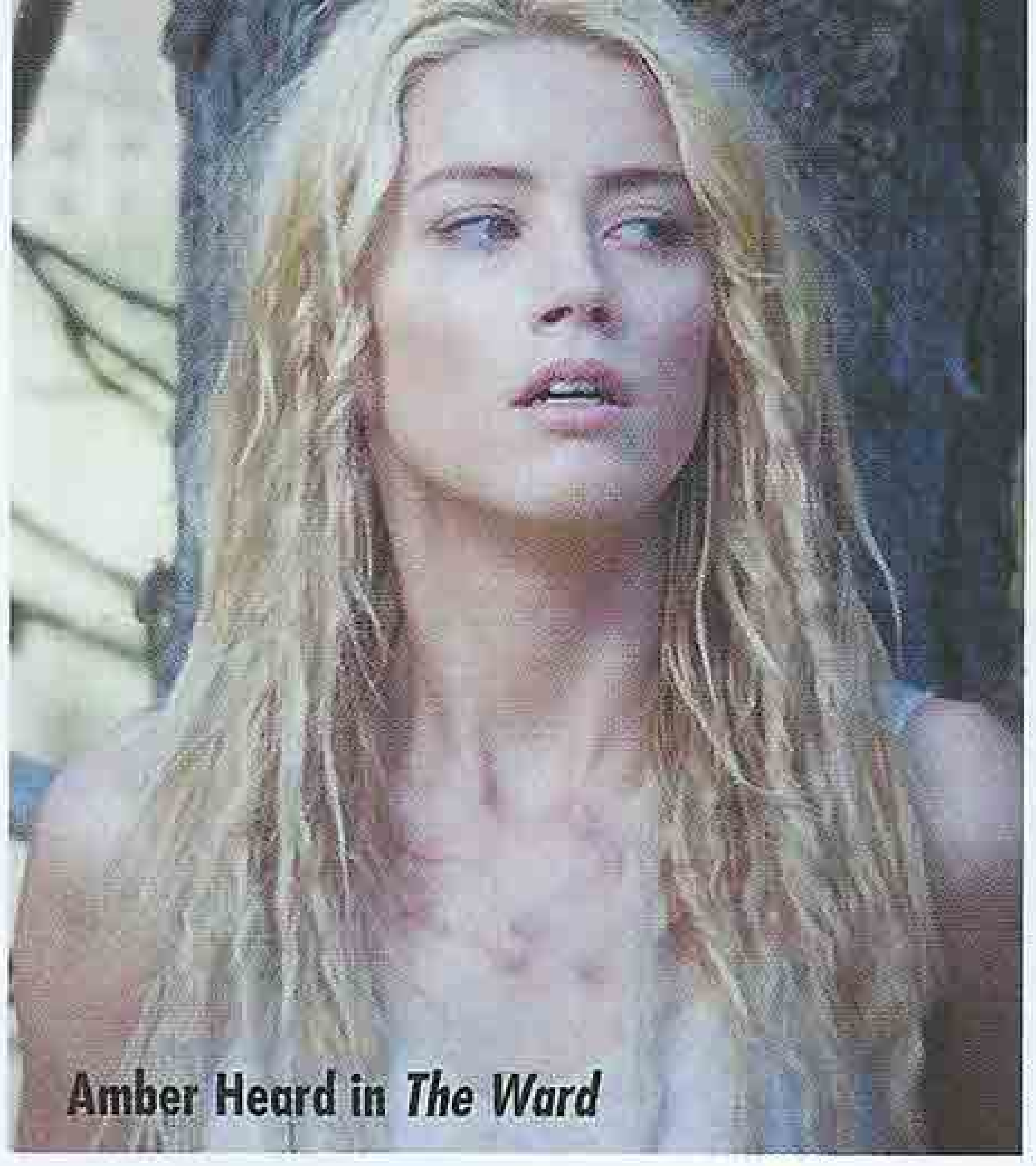

Pam Grier in *Escape from L.A.*

Photo: Copyright Paramount


Amber Heard in *The Ward*

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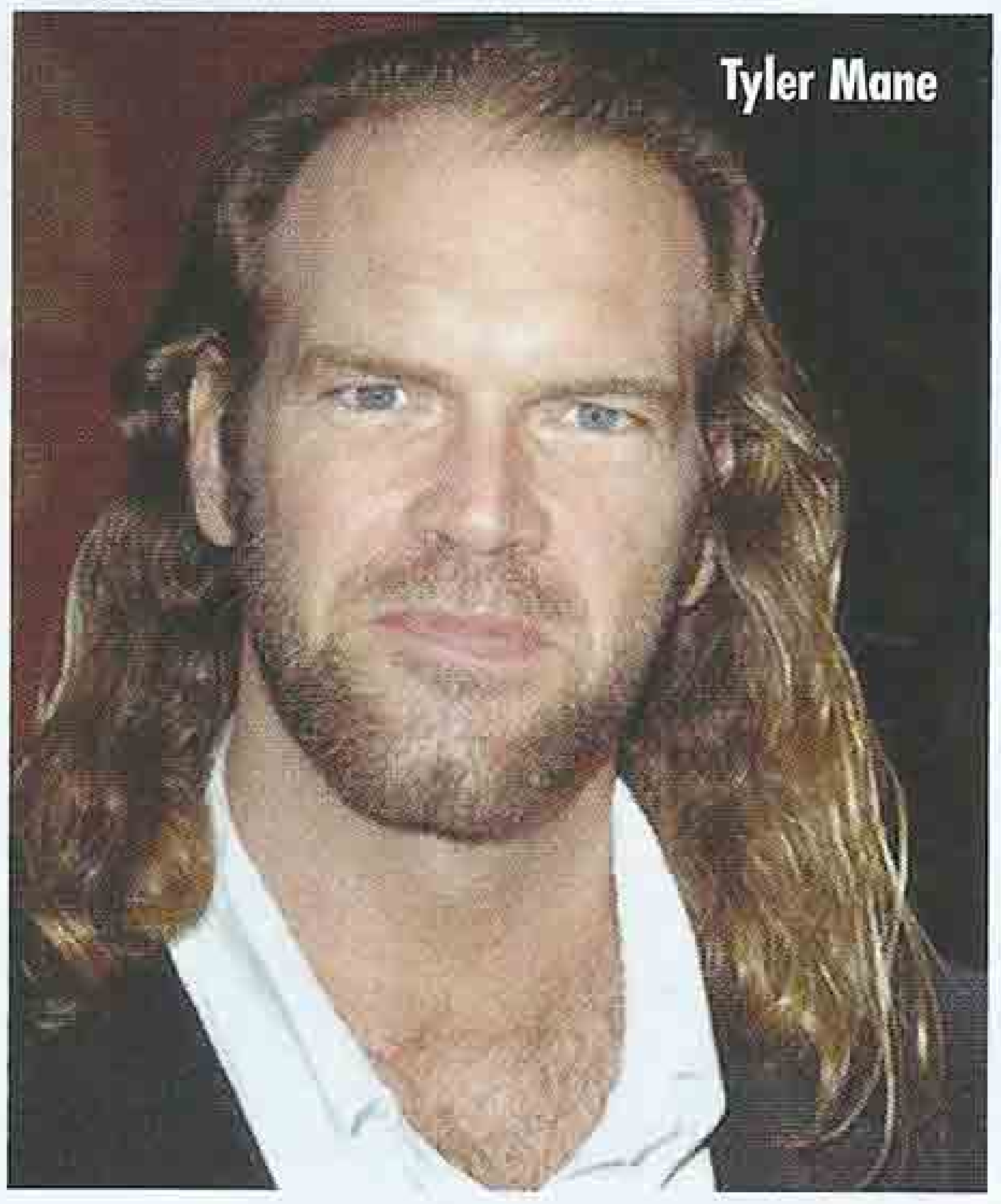
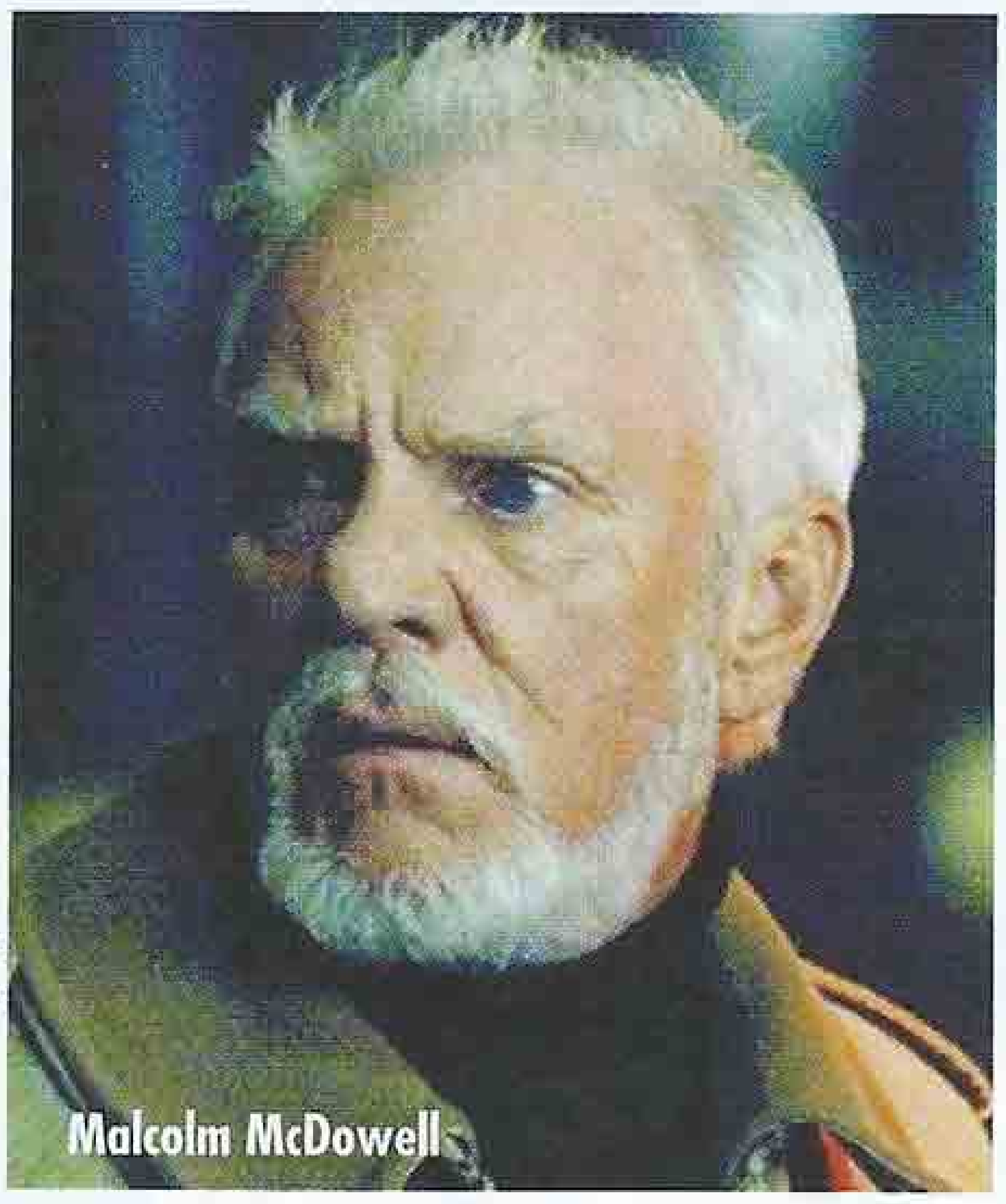

Tyler Mane


Malcolm McDowell

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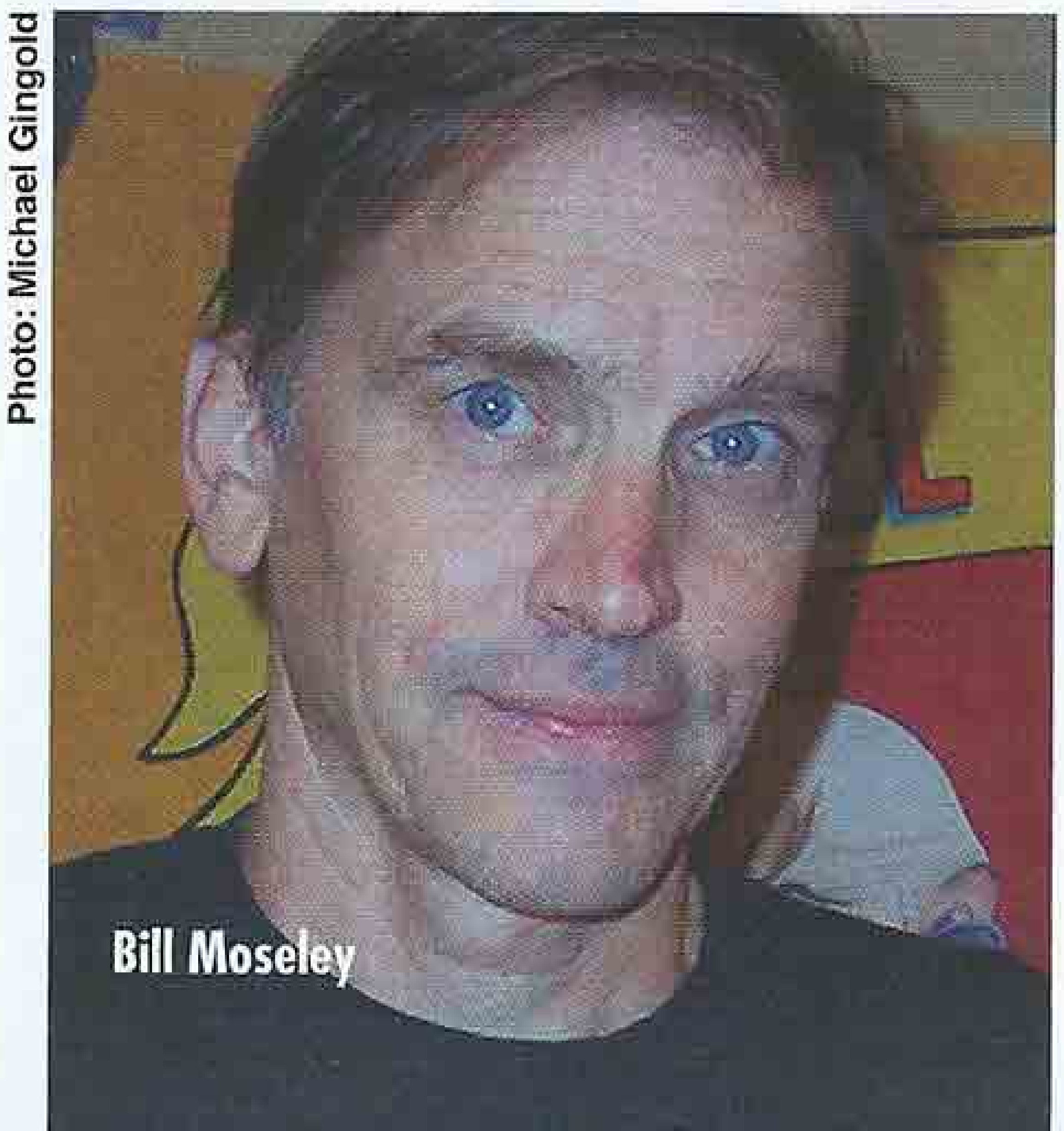

Bill Moseley

Photo: Michael Gingold

That was one of the films that cemented, for the studios, that horror could mean something on a bigger level—that they could put in a little bit of money and get a ton of money back. And technically, as a filmmaker, Carpenter is brilliant. If you look at the way *Halloween* is shot, he used the Panaglide in a way many people haven't. Instead of just having it follow people up and down stairs and through hallways, he used it just for atmosphere; that was something I had never seen before."

David Gregory, director/producer: "My favorite John Carpenter film is *Halloween*, because it was the first one I saw. I watched it when I was very young, around 8 or 9, on the BBC and was absolutely blown away by how terrifying it was. I'd been watching BBC horror double features every Friday night, and I'd never seen anything that was genuinely scary, and that was the first one where I was literally quivering while watching the film. After that, I saw every John Carpenter film as soon as it was out, or as soon as it came out on video when I was old enough. *The Thing* blew me away the most, because at that point, I hadn't seen special effects like that, where they *became* the setpieces. I'd seen murder, I'd seen gore, but I had never seen monster effects where you were like, 'Oh, you can build a film around how amazing these effects are.'

"It's interesting, because the featurettes I've been doing recently on *From Beyond* and *Society* and things like that always refer back to Rob Bottin's creations for *The Thing* being the start of, 'OK, you can do something else with horror. You can create surrealistic effects and take them over the top.' That's the way horror ended up going in the '80s, away from the simple blood and gore.

"In general, John Carpenter's influence has been immeasurable. Obviously, *Halloween* took things into American suburbia, and made an environment we thought was truly safe into a place that was absolutely unsafe and terrifying. And again, with *The Thing*, he incorporated the effects in a way you had never seen before. The idea that you can actually mold a human face into something else was absolutely terrifying."

Pam Grier, actress (*Escape from L.A., Ghosts of Mars*): "John Carpenter asked me, 'Do you know about this Snake Plissken?' And I said, 'Of course I do! I've watched it, you're a cult hero. Are you kidding me?' He said, 'Well, I want you to come in and meet Kurt Russell,' and I said OK. They sent me the script, and I went, 'Oh my God, I'm a guy!' So I put a sock in my leggings and went in and I nailed it. They thought I'd be too feminine and sexy, so I think the sock won me the job. It was so much fun, that transition.

"John is so creative when you talk to him; he loves so many different types of movies and directors, and you're like, [*gasps*]. You just sit at his feet and listen to him. His attention to detail is what draws people to come and work with him. The way he sets up his stories, you don't want to be a spectator; you want to be a participant, you want to be with him. You want to be in there: 'How does your brain work? How do you tell these incredible stories?' "

Amber Heard, actress (*The Ward*): "I loved working with John Carpenter. For someone who enjoys making horror films as much as I do, I definitely felt like *The Ward* was an amazing opportunity, and when I met with him for the first time, I felt I was going to be in really good hands. And I was involved with my character so much, I was shocked at how open to creative collaboration he was. I felt like he and I made a great team; he's a fantastic filmmaker, and I learned a lot from him."

Tyler Mane, actor: "I'm just happy John Carpenter did the *Halloweens*, because without those I wouldn't have gotten to be Michael Myers [in the remake]! He's the man. I just love the way he puts it all together—like how he brought *Halloween* to life and created that franchise, and now everybody knows the theme music. He's one of the major icons of horror, with all the pictures he's done. He is the Stan Lee of horror!"

Malcolm McDowell, actor: "John Carpenter is an amazing, innovative director. Honestly, I believe he pushed the horror genre a millennium along, so thank you, Mr. Carpenter. An incredible talent, and I think he'd be very talented in whatever genre he directed. I must say I have never seen the original *Halloween*, and when I was asked to play Dr. Sam Loomis [in the remake], I really didn't want to watch it because I didn't want to be influenced by the performance of the late Donald Pleasence, whom I have great admiration for. I wanted to just do my own thing, and let it stand separately. But of course, I know it's a masterly film from everything I've heard about it, and it's got to have been amazing because it spawned God knows how many imitators, as well as the franchise itself."

Bill Moseley, actor: "I hope John Carpenter keeps making movies. He is one of my favorite directors; he's a true master. I love the fact that he's got his hands in so many parts of the production, whether it's the directing, the writing, the music or the editing. I love *The Fog*, I certainly love *Halloween* and *Vampires* is also very cool. And when I've met him, he's always been very gracious, but he really seems like a noble [*laughs*]—a horror noble!"

Norman Reedus, actor (*Masters of Horror: Cigarette Burns*): "John

Tom Savini

is one of the coolest guys I know. I mean, he's a legend. I'd do a dog-food commercial with that guy; he's topnotch, and has a great sense of humor. He really knows what he wants right off the bat, he doesn't waste time and he gets good performances out of his actors, because they trust him and like him and he trusts them. He's a joy to work with.

"I was in a car crash in Berlin—I have a metal eye socket now—and *Cigarette Burns* was the first job I did after that accident. I was a little nervous going in because I was the Elephant Man for real for a while, but he was very easy on me and friendly with me, worked with me and built up my confidence. I owe him a huge debt of gratitude."

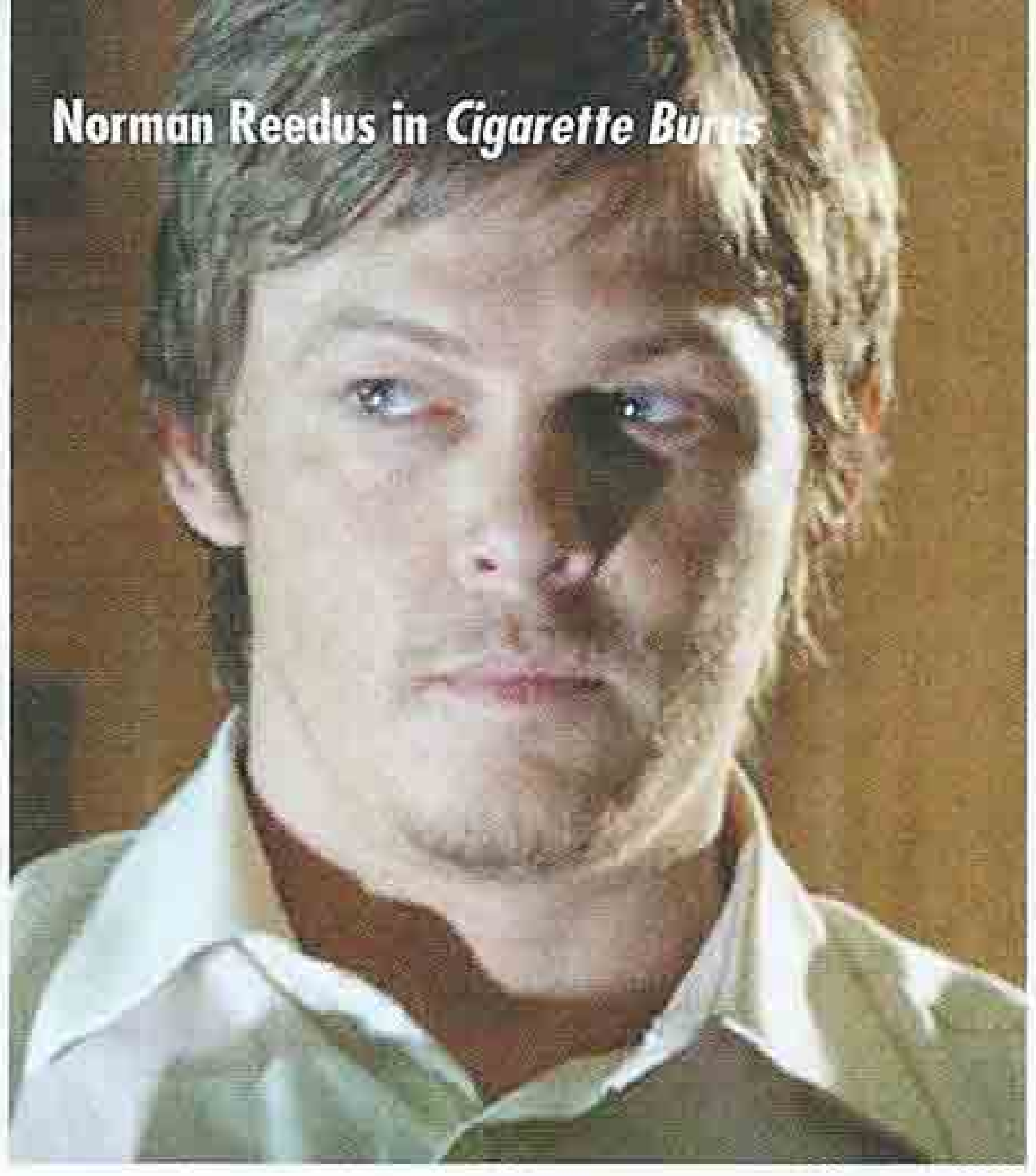
John Russo, filmmaker/author: "John Carpenter is one of the top talents ever in horror, and that talent was amply demonstrated in *Halloween*, which he had to make for a very low budget and went on to spawn the whole slasher genre. I've never worked with him on a movie, but he did very graciously give me an interview for one of my moviemaking books, and also wrote an article I published in one of my magazines. He was always a very gracious and cooperative person, and that's kind of rare in this business.

"I initially helped with *Body Bags*, which was written by Dan Angel and Billy Brown; I packaged that project with myself as director of one of the three segments. Dan wanted me to get two other directors, so I got Tobe Hooper, but George Romero turned it down, which was kind of odd. It ended up that when it finally got made, John Carpenter took it over. I said, 'That's good, Dan. You're gonna get your break now; I'm gonna bow out and give you a chance to get your first big movie done.' And John played the coroner, the guy who opens the body bags, and each corpse has a story to tell.

"It turned out to be the most successful movie Showtime had ever made at that time, in terms of viewer response and the number of times it ran and all that, so I still think George Romero made a mistake when he turned it down. I like *Creepshow*, but I thought *Body Bags* was stronger. It's a concept you can really latch onto: Here's this crazy coroner, and every bag he opens has a story. We all have a story, whether we're living or dead, and these happen to be dead [*laughs*]."

Tom Savini, makeup FX artist: "Effects-wise, *The Thing* blew me away. I still talk about it. People come up to me and ask, 'What's your favorite movie?' and I think the real masterpiece of splatter is Rob Bottin's work in *The Thing*. Any of Rob's work—he has a rare imagination. I've spoken to Rob many times about that, and I actually had dinner with John Carpenter at George Romero's house [in 1981], and he said, 'Do you know a guy named Rob Bottin?' I said, 'Oh yeah, he's a buddy,' because we had just conferenced about how to create Fluffy [for *Creepshow*]. John told these stories about waiting and waiting and waiting for days for Rob's effects to be done, but when they happened, it was mind-blowing! The guy with the electric pads that go through the guy's chest, his arms get cut off, that head on the floor—that's outlandish, it's so far out, it's surreal bordering on unreal. It's not some maniac chopping up girls on the subway."

Rob Zombie, filmmaker/musician: "I love John, and I love his cranky attitude—that's why we always get along [*laughs*]. No, I've known John since *Escape from L.A.* I did a song for that movie, based only on the fact that I wanted to meet John Carpenter and hang out on set. So I went down and I did hang out with him, and he was super-cool. I was there forever, and he walked me around and we talked a lot when he could have just kicked me out, because I'm sure he had better things to do than deal with me. I've always bumped into him over the years, and when [the *Halloween* remake] came up, he was the first person I called; I wanted him to know before anybody. And he was cool, you know—he was like, 'Great, go for it!' "



Norman Reedus in *Cigarette Burns*

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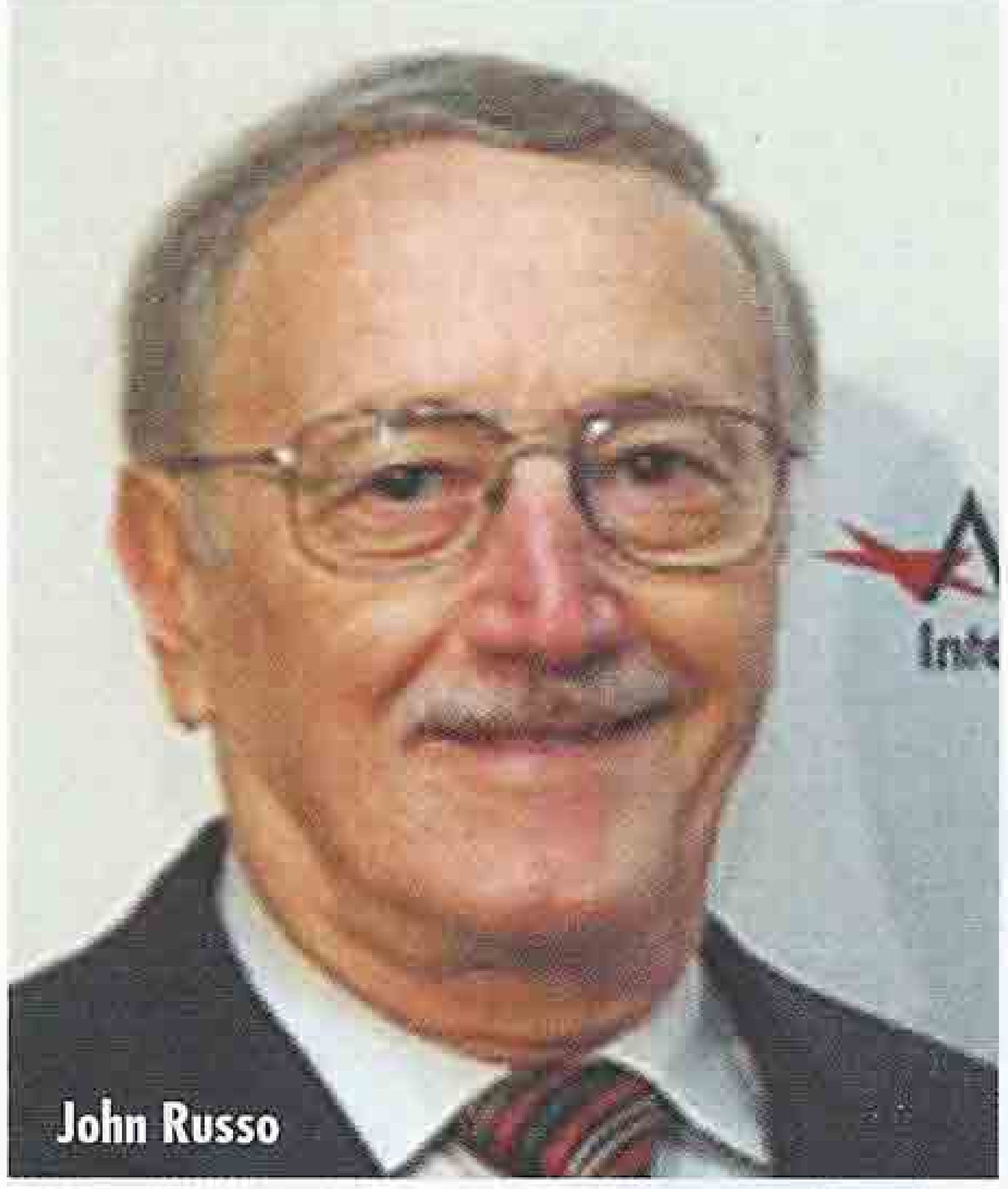
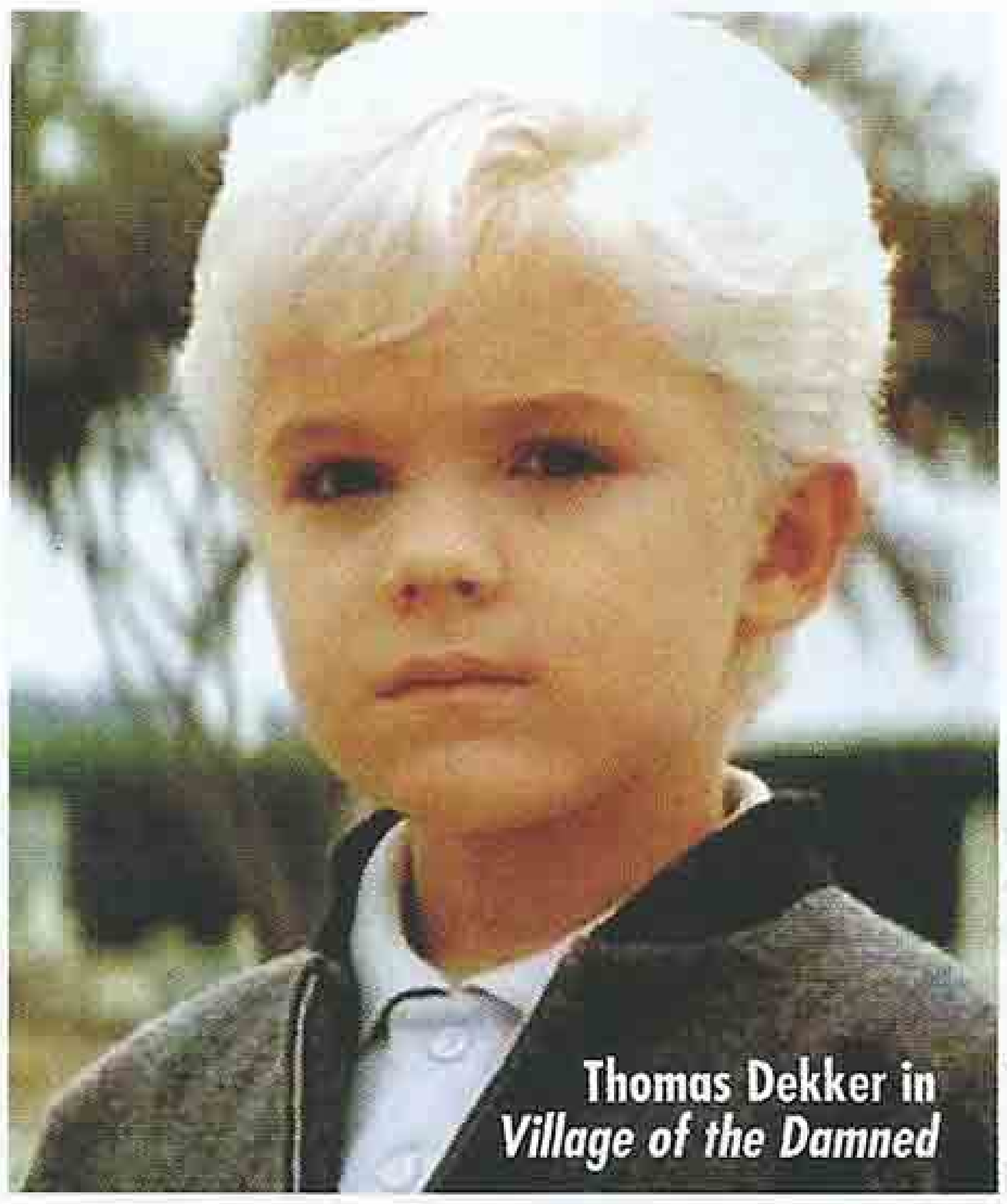


John Russo



Thomas Dekker in *Village of the Damned*

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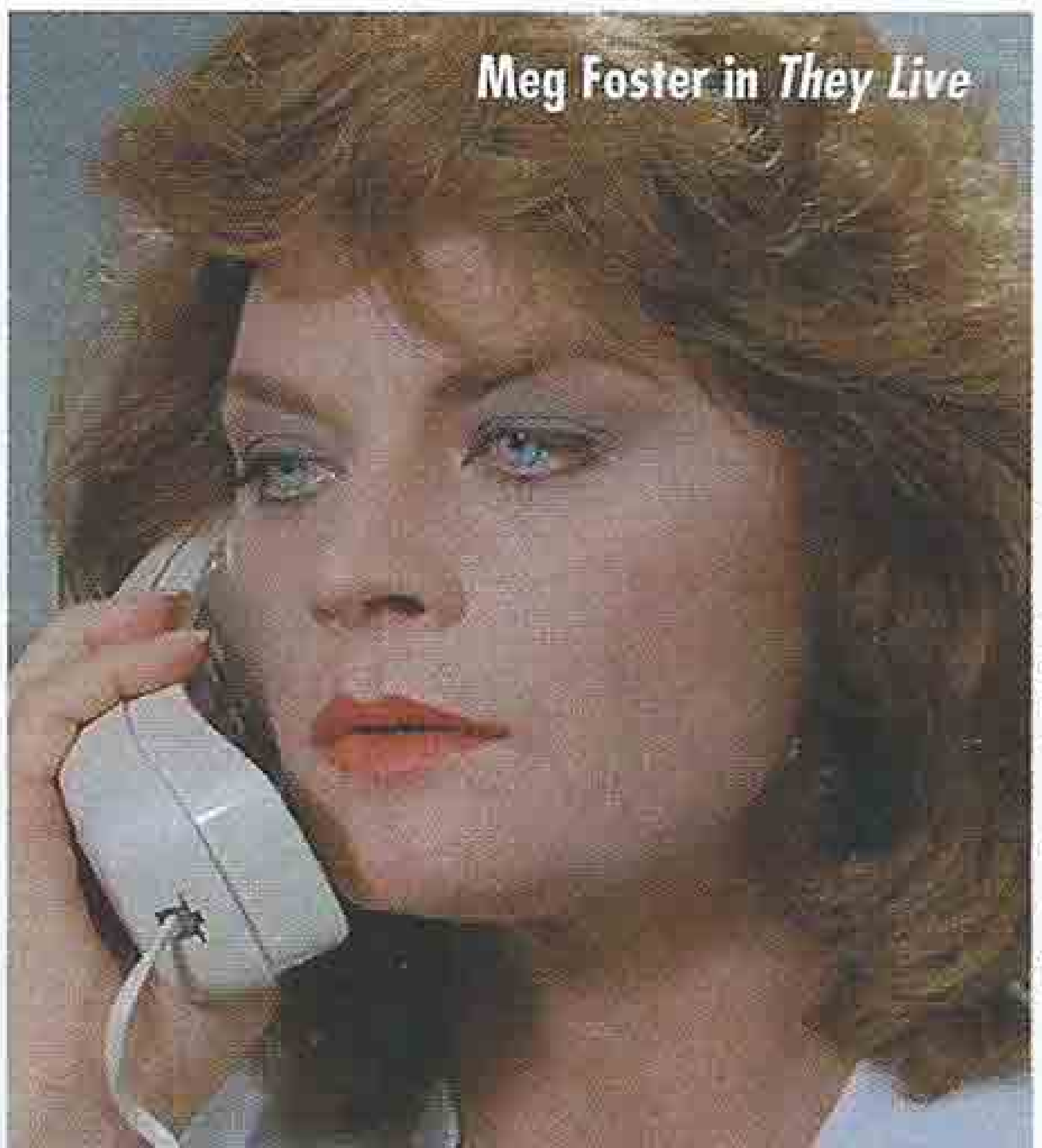

Meg Foster in *They Live*

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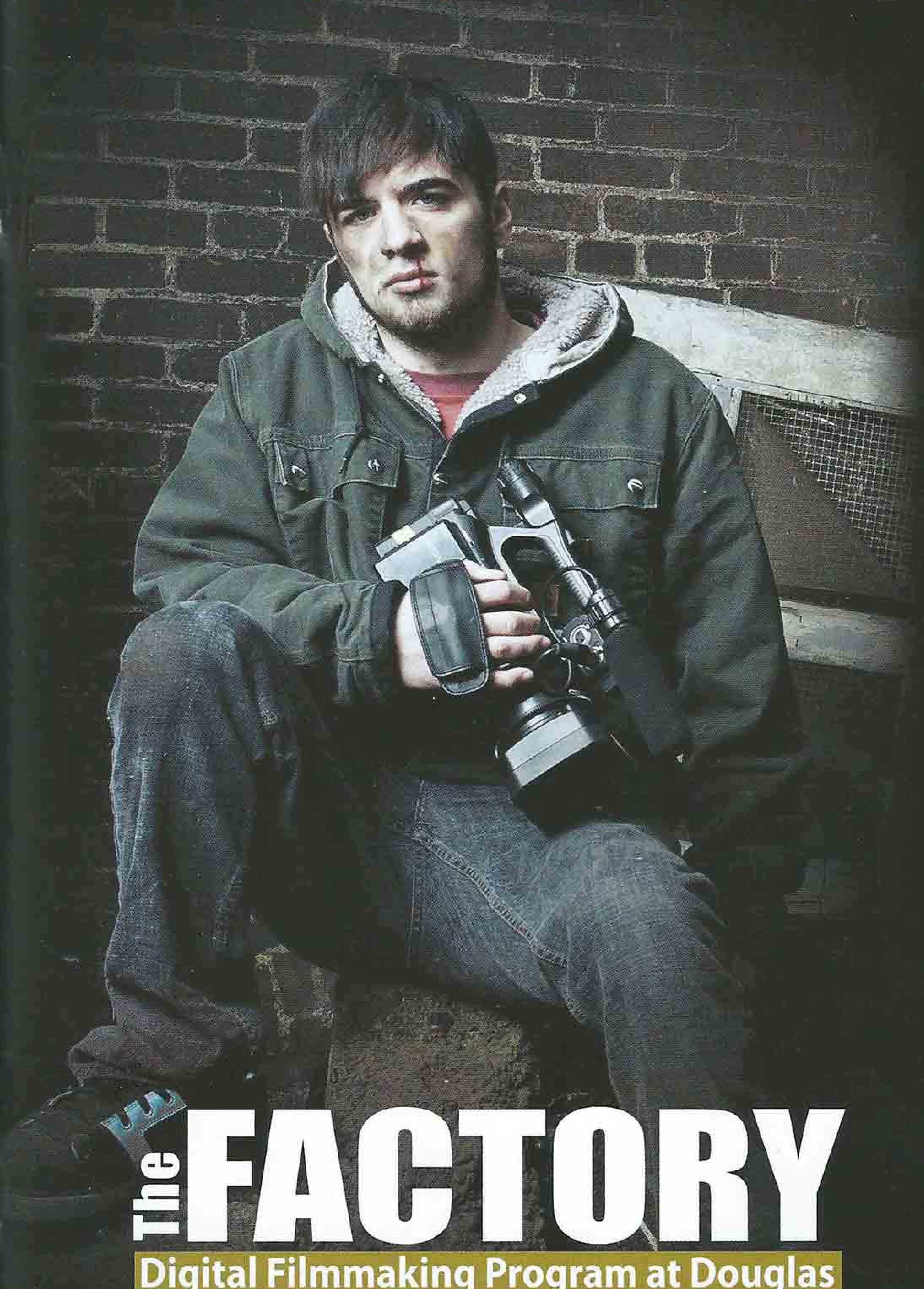

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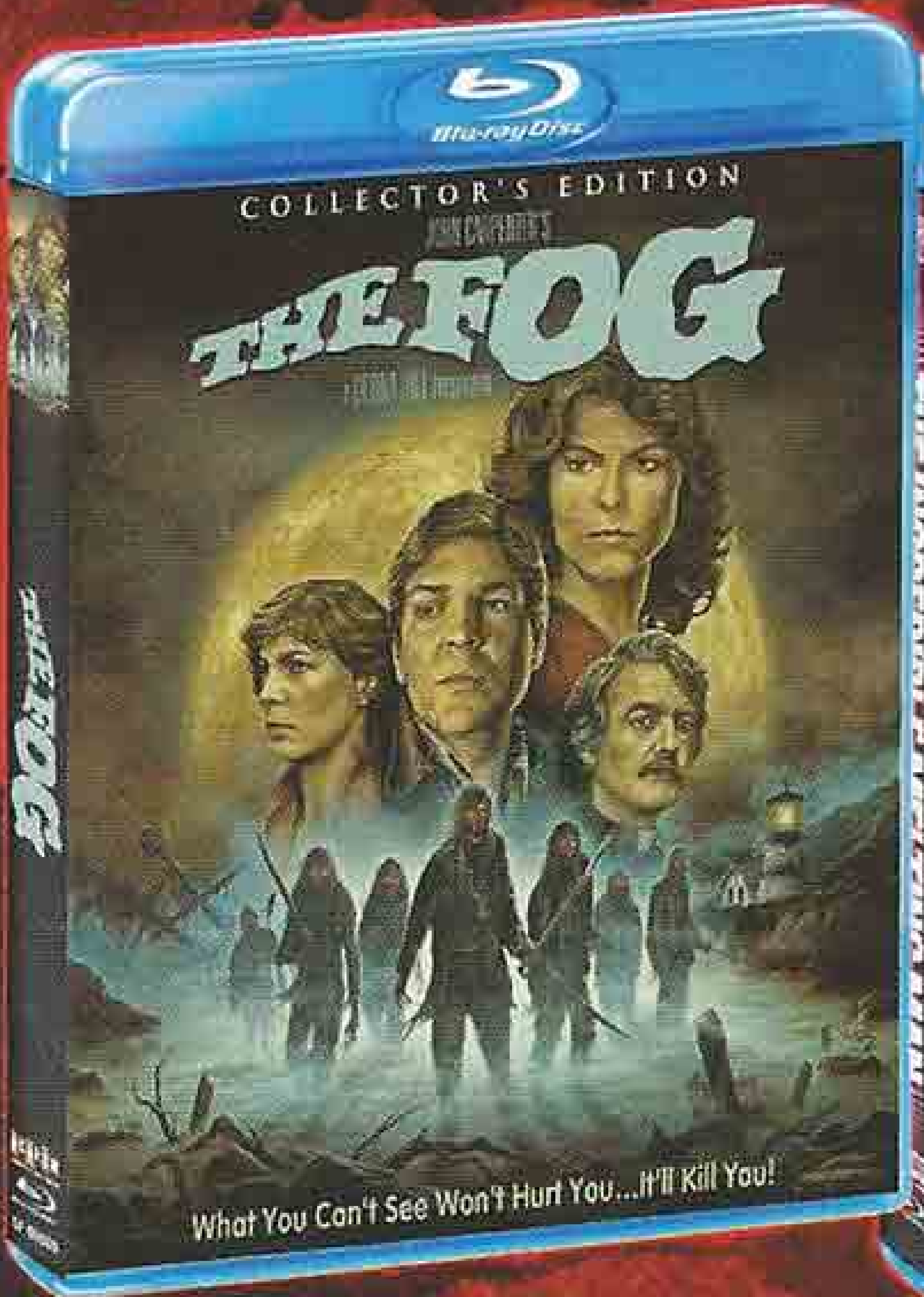
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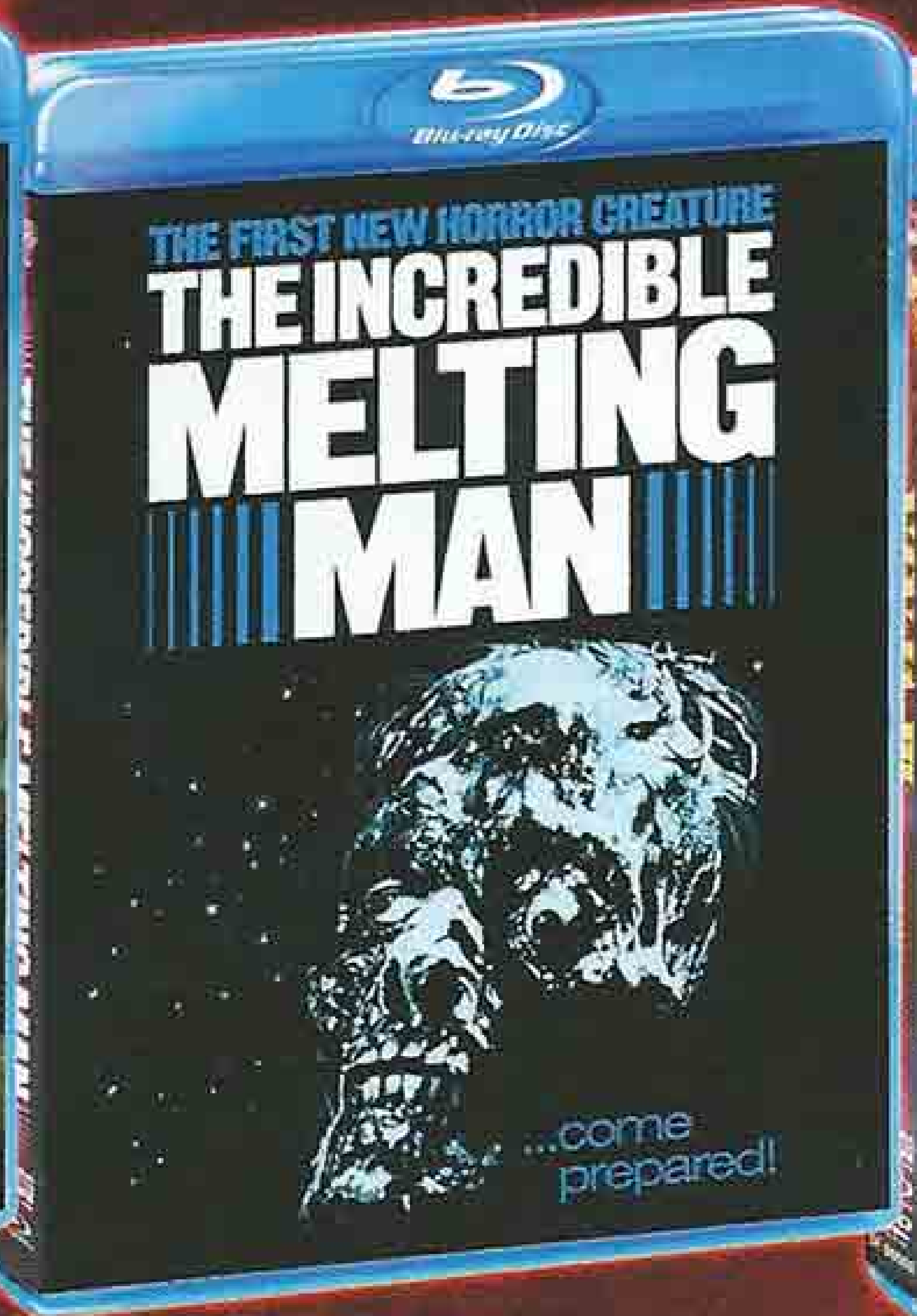
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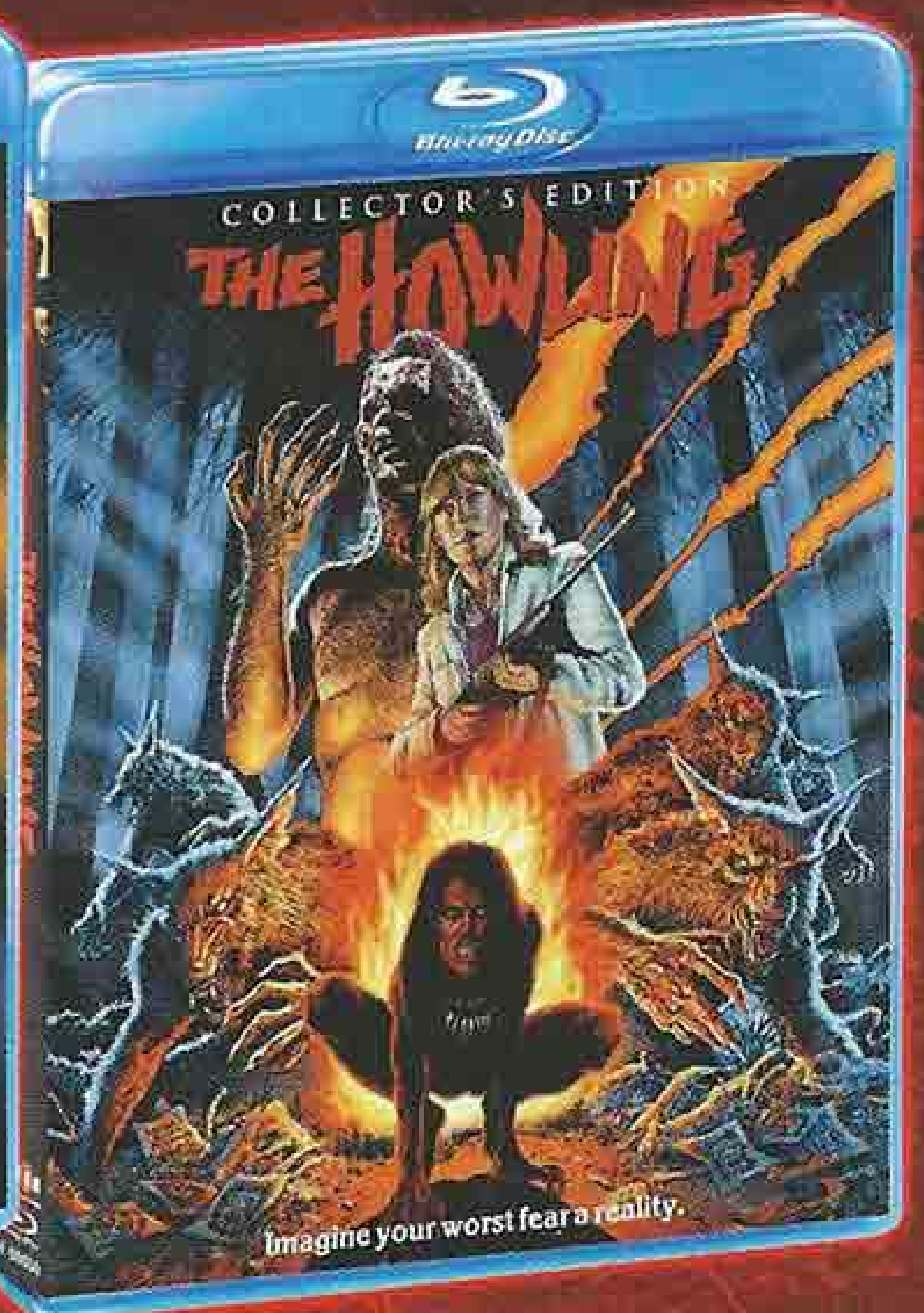
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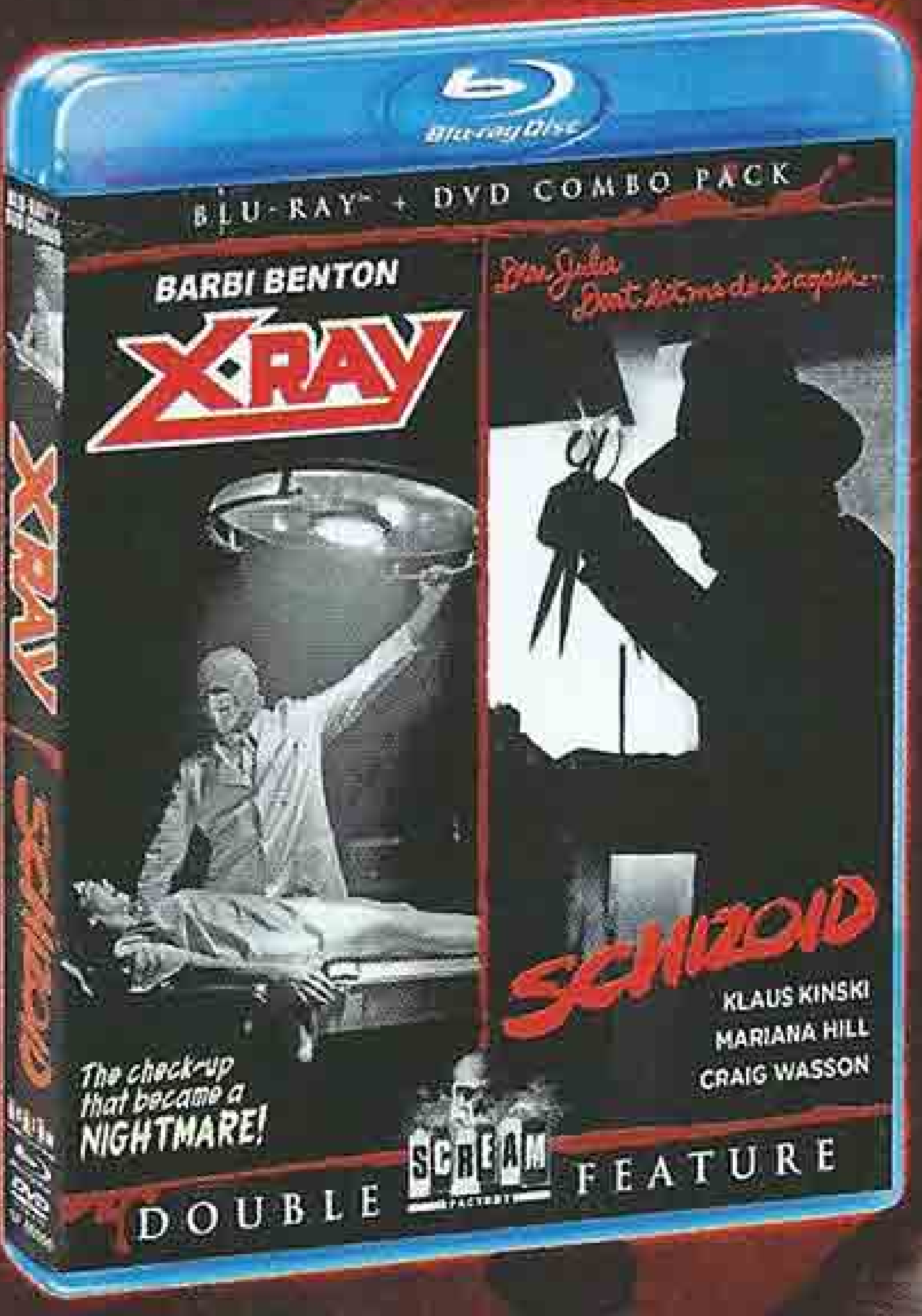
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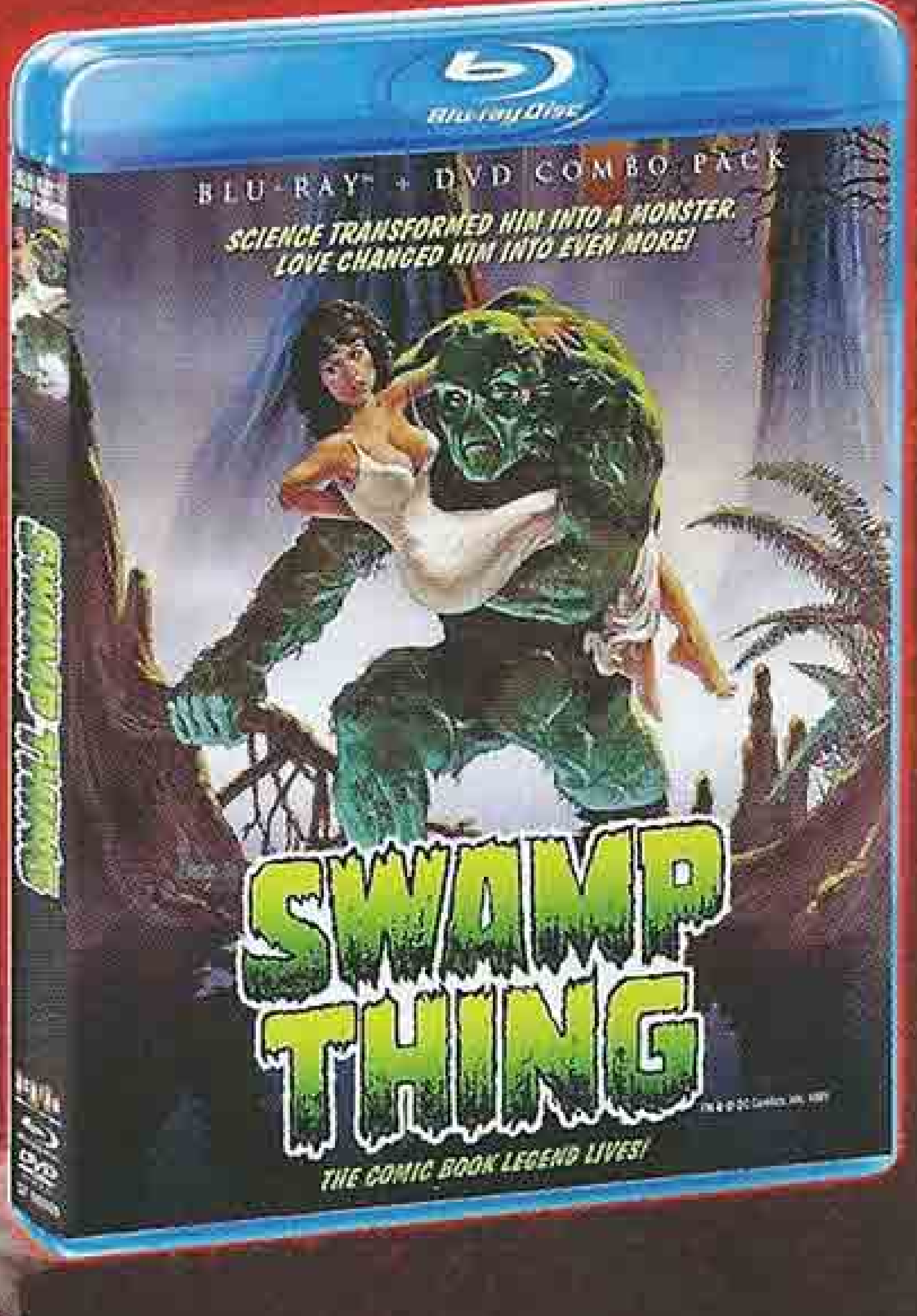
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